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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Articles

Meredith G. Kline and the Nexus of Two Disciplines

Michael Beck.....1

The Ethics of Birth Control: An Evangelical Analysis

Michael R. Burgos.....11

Jesus: The Ultimate Prophet Like Moses

Christian Mathis.....21

The Shepherd-Prophet: Confrontative Ministry and the Evangelicalism of Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Gregory W. Mathis.....30

The Mosaic Law and Its Application Today: Formulating a System to Identify, Discern and Apply the Law's General Equity

Austin Rouse.....49

Fighting for the Right to Pacifism: Proposing and Exemplifying Cooperative Pacifism

H. Michael Shultz Jr.....57

Standing Against the Scourge of Tyranny: The Role of Public Authority in Deposing Tyrants in *De Regno and Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*

Lucas E. Vieira.....66

Book Reviews

Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Five Points of Amillennialism*

Chris Chumita.....72

Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation*

H. Michael Shultz Jr.....75

Meredith G. Kline and the Nexus of Two Disciplines

Michael Beck, PhD

Pioneer of biblical theology, Geerhardus Vos, showed that an understanding of the development of special revelation was completely native to Reformed federalism.¹ Walking in Vos' steps, theologians of this tradition have continued to give careful attention to the rich and often uncharted connection between exegesis and dogmatics.² Even so, few have so wholeheartedly embraced, developed, and excelled in this area, as did Old Testament scholar Meredith G. Kline.³

Unfortunately, Kline has been given relatively little attention.⁴ Further, when considered, his work is typically presented in polemical argumentation rather than positive exploration.⁵ This essay is offered as a small step towards the remedy of this situation, if only to see glimmers of the many rich and varied nexus points within his theology. In this regard, merely two broader groupings of his larger corpus are here being considered. The first concerns Kline's insights from Ancient Near Eastern (hereafter, ANE) Scholarship. The second concerns his study of protology in the book of Genesis.

Theological Insights from ANE Scholarship

Kline began his career as an Old Testament biblical theologian during a time of emerging scholarship on Hittite diplomatic treaties.⁶ In this regard, he gave particular attention to the covenant

¹ G Vos, *Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diatheke*. (CrossReach Publications, 2017), 1675; cf. Richard C. Barcellos, *The Family Tree of Reformed Biblical Theology: Geerhardus Vos and John Owen, Their Methods of and Contributions to the Articulation of Redemptive History* (Owensboro, KY: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2010).

² G Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), xiv.

³ M Karlberg, "Reformed Theology as the Theology of the Covenants: The Contributions of Meredith G. Kline to Reformed Systematics," in *Creator Redeemer Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline*, ed. John R. Muether (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 237; David T Gordon, "Van Til and Theonomic Ethics," in *Creator Redeemer Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline*, ed. John R. Muether (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 278.

⁴ Cf. B Miller, "De-Klining From Chalcedon: Exegetical Roots Of The 'R2k' Project," in *For the Healing of the Nations: Essays on Creation, Redemption, and Neo-Calvinism*, ed. Peter Escalante and W B Littlejohn (Leesburg, VA: The Davenant Trust, 2014), 173; Robert C. Crouse, *Two Kingdoms & Two Cities: Mapping Theological Traditions of Church, Culture, and Civil Order* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 218.

⁵ Cf. G Bahnsen, "M.G. Kline on Theonomic Politics: An Evaluation of His Reply," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 1, no. 2 (1980), accessed July 2, 2020, <http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pe043.htm>; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr, *Covenantal Theonomy: A Response to T. David Gordon and Klinean Covenantalism* (Nacagdoches, TX: Covenant Media Foundation, 2005); K Gentry, Jr, *As It Is Written: The Genesis Account Literal or Literary?* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2016).

⁶ M M Kline. "Meredith G. Kline: A Biographical Sketch," in *Essential Writings of MG Kline*, Kindle. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 189–90.

concept as a central constituent of the Reformed system while, at the same time, engaging with new scholarship in ANE studies.⁷

The argument for which Kline is perhaps most well-known is his literary framework hypothesis concerning the creation account. Here, he argued that, while Genesis 1 did indeed refer to historical events, the six days themselves were to be viewed as a literary device that presented a metaphor of God's own workweek.⁸ Throughout his argument, the influence of ANE scholarship can be easily detected. In this regard, while Kline gives absolute primacy to scriptural exegesis, he also advocates the need for sharpened historical sensitivity to understand the text correctly.⁹

However, it was not only in Genesis that Kline offered these sorts of considerations. ANE scholarly influences can be observed throughout his treatment of the biblical story. Indeed, he made a forceful argument that, when viewed in light of findings concerning ancient Hittite treaties, the covenant concept itself could be shown to account for the entire canon-formation of the Old Testament.¹⁰ In this way, the implication of Kline's work extends beyond the realm of biblical studies and provides a rich grounding for prolegomena and the doctrine of Scripture.¹¹

Within this broader context, Kline also dedicated himself to a few key discoveries, each of which presented significant implications for his own understanding of systematic theology. For example, he saw that typical ancient treaty-ratification methods could be applied to circumcision and baptism and were thereby best understood as liturgical acts that denoted the curse sanction of the covenant.¹² Apprehending the potential of this insight, Stek referred to Kline's work in this area as "one of the most significant contributions to a theology of baptism to appear in many a year."¹³

Certainly, his thought presented some challenges to systematic theology. In this regard, he noted that "the traditional Presbyterian argument" for the reception of children into the covenant was flawed in that it is appealed to the promise of salvation.¹⁴ However, Kline remarks that "this is a confusion."¹⁵ Under the New Covenant, the promise of salvation has election in view and, as Kline states, "election simply is not the basis for our baptizing our children."¹⁶ Disagreeing with the wording of the typically "prescribed rituals" for infant baptism, Kline then asserted that while Christian parents should baptize their infants, they should *not* do this because they are "are holy in Christ."¹⁷ Such an understanding falsely presupposes knowledge of election and regeneration (in this regard, Kline gives a hearty ascent to the standard credo-baptist critique).

⁷ M M Kline. "Meredith G. Kline: A Biographical Sketch," in *Essential Writings of MG Kline*, Kindle. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 191, 360.

⁸ M G Kline. *Essential Writings of MG Kline*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 821–822.

⁹ N Reid, "The Mosaic Covenant," in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. GP Waters, JR Muether, and N Reid (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 460.

¹⁰ M G Kline, "Canon and Covenant," *Westminster Theological Journal* 32, no. 1 (1969).

¹¹ Cf. M S Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 44, 151, 152; H N Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, ed. H. Translator Gaffin. Editor, De Jongste (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1988).

¹² M G Kline, "Oath And Ordeal Signs," *Westminster Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 (1965); CL Irons, "Meredith Kline's By Oath Consigned Compared with Kingdom Prologue," 2013, <http://upper-register.com/papers/BOC-compared-with-KP.pdf>, 17; M M Kline. "Meredith G. Kline: A Biographical Sketch," in *Essential Writings of MG Kline*, Kindle. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 381.

¹³ J Stek, "A New Theology of Baptism? Baptism: A Sign of Grace or Judgement?," *Calvin Theological Journal* 1, no. 1 (1966): 73.

¹⁴ *Meredith Kline: Baptist Criticism of WCF Is Correct*, 2016, accessed November 10, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnL__JxiqWo.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

However, against both Baptist, Reformed, and Presbyterian, he urged that Christian parents should indeed baptise their children in a manner that was in keeping with its source idea as an ancient concept of covenant consecration. In this regard, Kline noted that, in ANE treaties, when a person was brought into covenant with the suzerain, that person was also called upon to consecrate all those over whom he was in authority.¹⁸ However, the purpose of this ritual was not to appeal to a promise. Instead, it was to invoke a maledictory curse, both upon oneself and one's household.¹⁹ As it applied to the Christian's consecration to Christ in baptism, Kline therefore believed that the sign of this consecration could—and should—be applied to infants without giving them any false assurances.²⁰ The judgment ordeal itself, rather than the assurance of salvation, was primarily in view of the administration of both circumcision and baptism.²¹

In a similar vein, Kline disagreed with systematic theologians who spoke of the covenant of grace as something that had both an internal and an external sphere.²² Instead, he argued that the internal aspect was better thought of in terms of the covenant of redemption or *pactum salutis*. This meant that, when considering the place of the children of believers, membership in the covenant of grace and membership in the church should certainly be regarded coterminously.²³

Another example of the way that Kline's insights present significant fodder for systematic theologians can be found in his treatment of the Decalogue. Kline drew attention to the fact that the tables of the law showed a very close resemblance to historic suzerain-vassal treaty formats. He therefore argued that, rather than the traditionally conceived 'two tables' of the law, which were both needed to present the full number of commandments, the tables should be understood as two identical copies of the covenant for each of the parties involved in the covenant relationship. This is why God—who functioned as the suzerain—received a copy that was stored in the Ark of the Covenant.²⁴

Kline's insights, therefore, differed sharply from the more typical association of the decalogue with an ANE law code. Once again, the implication for systematic theology is forceful—the tables could not be properly appreciated apart from the greater covenant in which they were revealed. Indeed, Kline saw this to present a significant challenge to a typical Reformed understanding. Rather than serving as a generic presentation of the otherwise abstract and timeless moral law, the decalogue was instead to be understood as a particular and historical-covenantal enshrinement of the otherwise transcendent moral law. This, in turn, had a strong bearing on the way in which the decalogue could be applied to those outside of Israel's unique setting.²⁵

As indicated by examples such as these, Kline saw the ANE treaties as something of a “theological prism” through which to sharpen one's understanding of the Scriptures.²⁶ As indicated above, it was also repeatedly the case that these insights fostered a greater focus upon the relationship between biblical and

¹⁸ M G Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1975), 86.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 87–102; M S Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 789.

²⁰ M G Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1975), 90.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 81–83.

²² Cf. L Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 284.

²³ Cf. R P Flinn, “Baptism, Redemptive History, and Eschatology: The Parameters of the Debate,” in *The Failure of the American Baptist Culture*, ed. James B Jordan (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982), 124–151.

²⁴ M G Kline, “Law Covenant,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 27, no. 1 (1964).

²⁵ *Contra* G Bahnsen, “M. G. Kline on Theonomic Politics: An Evaluation of His Reply,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 1, no. 2 (1980), accessed July 2, 2020, <http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pe043.htm>.

²⁶ CL Irons, “Meredith Kline's By Oath Consigned Compared with Kingdom Prologue,” 2013, <http://upper-register.com/papers/BOC-compared-with-KP.pdf>, 4.

systematic theology. In this regard, a key area in which Kline demonstrated this nexus-type relationship was in the study of covenant theology itself.

As Kline progressed in his career, he used the above insights to sharpen his own understanding of Reformed federalism. Pertaining to matters of taxonomy, for example, he eventually moved from a bi-covenant to a tri-covenant scheme.²⁷ Adopting the distinct terminology of a trifold schema allowed him to elucidate a proper antithesis between a works principle in the *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption) and a grace principle in the *foedus gratiae* (covenant of grace).²⁸ Further, where Kline was initially reluctant to refer to the pre-fall arrangement in terms of a works covenant, when confronted with the implications of monocovenantalism, he came to see this terminology as worthy of a full insistence.²⁹

The most striking of the changes in Kline was his movement away from believing that both the Abrahamic covenant and the New Covenant stood in administrative continuity with the Mosaic covenant.³⁰ In this, he came to argue that the Mosaic covenant was a typological republication of the *foedus operum*, and thus stood in direct antithesis with the gracious character of the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant. Insofar as the covenant of grace ran through the greater Mosaic economy, a basic sense of essential continuity remained. Yet, in regard to the decalogue itself and its unique conventual enshrinement at Sinai, Kline insisted on a sharp law-gospel antithesis, leaving much for the systematic theologian to process.³¹

While only a few instances of Kline's insights are here surveyed, the above demonstrates well that Kline's profession as an Old Testament biblical theologian (especially as it coincided his scholarship in ANE studies) produced many fascinating nexus-type concepts for Reformed dogmatics. Though ANE findings have since developed, Kline's particular insights have much ongoing relevance to areas including (but not limited to) the fields of bibliology, sacramentology, and nomology and federalism. Even so, a special emphasis must now be placed upon Kline's study of protology and the insights that arose from his lifelong devotion to the book of Genesis.

Theological Insights from the Genesis Protology

If Kline gained some notice because of his consideration of the ANE historical context of the Old Testament, this was even more so due to his implementation of these ideas to the Genesis protology. Once again, while a full analysis of even this very narrow aspect of Kline's thought is far beyond the current purview, I now move to highlight at least some of his ideas, particularly as they served to foster a complex array of theological nexus points in the fields of protology, anthropology and eschatology.

²⁷ CL Irons, "Meredith Kline's By Oath Consigned Compared with Kingdom Prologue," 2013, <http://upper-register.com/papers/BOC-compared-with-KP.pdf>, 7.

²⁸ Ibid., 13.

²⁹ JM Frame, *The Escondido Theology: A Reformed Response to Two Kingdom Theology* (Lakeland, FL: Whitefield Media Productions, 2011), 151–198.

³⁰ Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1975), 78.

³¹ CL Irons, "Meredith Kline's By Oath Consigned Compared with Kingdom Prologue," 2013, <http://upper-register.com/papers/BOC-compared-with-KP.pdf>, 25.

As already alluded to, Kline is likely most well-known for his development of the thought of Ridderbos and Noordtzij regarding their literary framework interpretation of Genesis 1.³² With these thinkers, Kline argued that the first three days of the creation account are primarily concerned with a presentation of creation realms.³³ After creating the realms of light, dark, sky and sea, the realms of land and vegetation were also brought into being. After the completion of the realms, day four recapitulates back to day one and describes the same basic historical reality, but now with a focus on the corresponding ruling-creature. For example, the sun is said to rule the day. The moon is said to rule the night. The great sea creatures are shown to rule the ocean and the great winged creatures to rule the sky. In this manner, the point of the literary framework is to build up to the key point—while man is given the domain of all the earth, he is to rule as a vassal king only, for God alone is the supreme ruler, or suzerain king, over all of creation itself.³⁴

The theological import of this framework presents many aspects of theological significance. For one thing, there is an obvious declaration of God's supreme lordship as the magnificence of the creation is presented according to His "sovereign design and purpose".³⁵ Further, it shows that, from the very beginning, God has entered into space and time (even darkness and disorder) to bring about a Sabbath *telos* of form and fullness that is both balanced and good. For another, it suggests that the central purpose of the creation account is not to explain the scientific details involved in man's origins, but rather, to reveal a fundamental eschatology that was, at the first, set before man.³⁶ At a very minimum, then, the Genesis protology showed that "history will not end in tragic darkness and chaos but will continue in triumphant light and order".³⁷ However, when considered in light of the events that followed (in particular, the covenant of works and its attached probationary period) the theological significance of the literary framework can be said to go further still. In fact, Kline shows that it reveals the great teleological context in which all of later redemptive history is to be understood.

To develop this further, consider that, for Kline, the endoxated presence of God presented the universe as his own "macrocosmic temple".³⁸ In this way, all of creation, from the outset, was designed to reflect and image the glory of God. This same idea is next brought to an even sharper focus on the *imago Dei*³⁹—which Kline understands as a microcosmic replica (image) of this same theophanic glory.⁴⁰

To be more specific, Kline sees the *imago Dei* in terms of three intrinsically related components. First, is the functional component, referring to man's vassal authority under the Great Suzerain. Second, is the ethical component, which serves as an intuitive referent to the holiness of God's that is to be emulated

³² J J Yeo, *Plundering the Egyptians: The Old Testament and Historical Criticism at Westminster Theological Seminary (1929-1998)* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 122; M G Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," *Westminster Theological Journal* 20, no. 2 (1958); M G Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and the Christian Faith* 48, no. 1 (1996): 2–15; M G Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 35–41; G L Archer et al., *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. D G Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux Press, 2000), 217–304.

³³ M G Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 39.

³⁴ Meredith G. Kline, *Essential Writings of MG Kline* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 1014

³⁵ J K Jeon, *Biblical Theology: Covenants and the Kingdom of God in Redemptive History* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2017), 10.

³⁶ G J Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 40; cf. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 73–74.

³⁷ B K. Waltke and C J Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 55.

³⁸ M G Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 21.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

by man. Third, is the formal component. This pertains to man's promise of glorification and "luminosity".⁴¹

Of the above, it is this last formal component which Kline sees as most closely connected to the *telos* of creation itself (the very same *telos* that had already been made manifest in Genesis 1:2 by the Spirit's endoxation over the face of the waters). Kline therefore argues that man's eschatological goal of glorification should be seen as that which mirrors God's design for (a) his temple and (b) all of creation.⁴² In this way, the luminous presence of God's own glory and realm should be seen to have been revealed as far more than a display of God's sovereignty. The Genesis protology was revealed to present the very thing to be imaged by man.⁴³ In this regard, God's own work and subsequent entrance into Sabbath rest provides the great and "archetypal pattern" for history.⁴⁴ It points to the eschatological *telos* of man's work as a vassal ruler of God's kingdom.⁴⁵ The luminous presence, then, was nothing short of a down payment of the glory to come. The Sabbath day, in turn, was a covenantal pledge of the blessedness to be entered upon completion of the initial probation and covenantal task.⁴⁶

Further reinforcing this central protological agenda, Kline's articulation of the literary framework in Genesis 1 highlights something that is often missed: the first triad of days was brought to a climax in the creation of vegetation and fruit-bearing trees. The second triad of days finds its climax in the creation of man as one who rules over all the aforementioned realms and is thus said to be made in God's own image. This means that the pattern of the framework is itself designed to highlight that, although man is given all the world to rule, the direct sanctuary of his realm is linked to day three: the garden and its fruit-bearing trees—the very arena of in which the short-range requirements of the covenant task are to be carried out.⁴⁷ Indeed, this strongly suggests that a framing priority for the author of the Genesis protology was, in fact, to set the stage for what systematic theology identifies as the *foedus operum*.

Once again, the above has a host of implications for dogmatics, both in terms of anthropology and eschatology. For one thing, Kline reinforces the extremely important place of the *foedus operum* in any attempt to understand the true nature of the *imago Dei*. As Horton explains, this covenantal relationship between God and mankind "is not something added to human nature but is essential to it".⁴⁸ The image is "not something in us", but rather "something between us and God that constitutes a covenantal relationship".⁴⁹ Further, with this in view, all of the main historical views of the *imago Dei* can, in fact, be accepted to some degree.

⁴¹ M G Kline, *God, Heaven and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 215; Kline also highlights that the formal component of the image has a close connection to the functional aspect. This is because the functional task of Adam would involve his progressive and historical subduing of the earth as the vassal king. Likewise, the ethical component is also intrinsically related. This is because, during his initial probation in Eden, he would be in a state of "simple righteousness". However, as he progressed, he would enter a state of "confirmed righteousness". M G Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 31.

⁴² M Karlberg, "Reformed Theology as the Theology of the Covenants: The Contributions of Meredith G. Kline to Reformed Systematics," in *Creator Redeemer Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline*, ed. John R. Muether (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 242.

⁴³ J H Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 39.

⁴⁴ J K Jeon, *Biblical Theology: Covenants and the Kingdom of God in Redemptive History* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2017), 10.

⁴⁵ J V Fesko, *Last Things First* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2007), 98.

⁴⁶ M G Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 31.

⁴⁷ Jeon, J K, *Covenant Theology: John Murray's and Meredith G. Kline's Response to the Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 199.

⁴⁸ M S Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 380.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 381.

A substantive view, for example, is correct in so far as it identifies the human faculties that make mankind able to serve as God's covenant servants. A relational view is correct in so far as it points to man's *telos* in the covenant relationship. A functional view is correct in so far as it identifies the nature of the covenant task and humanity's ability to carry it out. A holistic view also has merit. However, by means of the covenant concept, it can be further defined. In other words, both the faculties and functions of mankind are significant in portraying the image primarily because (a) they enable mankind to enter a covenantal relationship with God, and (b) they enable mankind to do the covenantal work that God has appointed.⁵⁰

In light of the above, Kline's consideration of the Genesis protology suggests the need for systematic theologians to keep the covenant concept properly in view. As Horton says, "the significance of the *imago Dei* is [found in] the covenantal commission with which Adam was entrusted; namely, to enter God's everlasting Sabbath with the whole creation in his train."⁵¹ In other words, to understand the anthropology in terms of covenant is, in many ways, simply to understand how God has chosen to relate to the apex of his creation. Similarly, to understand eschatology by way of covenant is once again to understand God's own declaration concerning the hope, destiny and *telos* of mankind.

As Gentry and Wellum point out,⁵² an interpretation that takes the covenant concept seriously also "best honours" the normal use of the image and likeness in its initial "cultural and linguistic setting".⁵³ Certainly, in an ANE context, this account would have been understood in terms of the introduction to an important covenant relationship. It is a matter of awe that the "apex of the created order" is not only given the ability to be "addressed directly" by God, but is also able to enter into a unique relationship with the creator Himself.⁵⁴ Further, God's entrance into Sabbath rest pointed clearly to the fact that, not only could God himself be "found in time"⁵⁵, but that man was called to participate in and "look forward to the eternal, redemptive" rest that God holds forth for him.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Once again, while a fuller analysis of Kline's thought is outside the scope of this essay, what has here been highlighted is that Kline's corpus fosters an incredibly rich nexus for the disciplines of biblical and systematic theology. While limiting this discussion to some of his contributions in the areas of (1) ANE studies, and (2) Genesis protology, it can nevertheless be clearly observed that his work has produced a rich harvest of connection, overlap, and foundation for the fields of bibliology, sacramentology, nomology, anthropology and eschatology. In each of these instances, Kline's contribution to scholarship is repeatedly shown to be historically sensitive, exegetically robust, and systematically nuanced. Though some of his ideas were indeed controversial, all who appreciate the treasures of the

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 396; D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19, no. 1 (May 1, 1968): 53–103.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁵² P J Gentry and Dr Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012), 77.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁵⁴ G J Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 38–39; cf. J H Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 37; P J Gentry and S J Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012), 201–202.

⁵⁵ D W Cotter, *Genesis: Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, ed. J T Walsh, C Franke, and D W Cotter, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 19.

⁵⁶ B K Waltke and C J Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 68.

Vosian tradition and its rich point of intersection with Reformed dogmatics, will doubtless find much value in the careful reading of his work. To that end, this paper is presented in the hope of encouraging future scholars to give more attention to the many rich biblico-systematic offerings of this highly stimulating and Reformed thinker.

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The Ethics of Birth Control: An Evangelical Analysis

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Prior to establishing either the church or state, God established the family. The basis for this institution is marriage—a man and woman bound by covenant and given the charge of progeny and dominion over the newly created earth (Gen. 1:28; cf. 9:1). As the fundamental building block of civilization, “the family contains the church in embryo,” and includes within it all the essential elements to train good citizens of the state.² Since children are the “fruit” of the marital act (Ps. 127:3) and are of critical importance to the perpetuation of civilization and the church, the church catholic has historically held that the intentional prevention of pregnancy through contraceptive measures is a sinful deviation from the design and command of God.³ However, concurrent with Western society’s broad acceptance of birth control in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many evangelicals have similarly accepted various contraceptive methods.

The development of reproductive technologies, the rise of anti-natalist sentiments, the proliferation of birth control, and the conflicting views of birth control articulated by the church require parsing by every Christian couple. Whereas evangelicals have generally rejected contraceptive measures that may result in the destruction of a child in the earliest stages of life (i.e., abortifacient drugs),⁴ questions surrounding the use of other birth control measures are a recurring issue within both premarital and marriage counseling. This study evaluates the use of birth control within the context of Christian marriage by considering how the Bible describes children, examining the meaning and relevance of the account of Onan (Gen. 38:8-10), and critical interaction with the argumentation of an evangelical proponent of birth control.

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² George C. Scipione, *The Battle for the Biblical Family*, 2nd ed. (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Pub., 2018), 22.

³ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, 2.10 (ANF 2:261); John Chrysostom, *Homily XXVIII on the Gospel of Matthew*, 5 (NPNF¹ 10:194); Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, 5 (NPNF¹ 3:401); Jerome, *Against Jovinianus*, 1.20 (NPNF² 6:361); Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 38-44*, Luther’s Works, Vol. 7, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter D. Hansen (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1965), 20-1. Cf. the prohibition “Do not make potions (οὐ φαρμακεύσεις)” in the *Didache*, 2.2 (ANF 7:378). This is arguably a reference to the production and consumption of contraceptives given the context of prohibitions related to illicit sex and childbearing and similar uses of the verb in relevant antiquity.

⁴ See for example Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 752-3; Mark Liederbach, “Contraception” in Andreas J. Köstenberger, David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 123-29. Cf. Paris who takes a more lenient view and suggests a lack of substantial evidence for the abortifacient effect of hormonal contraceptives. Jenell W. Paris, *Birth Control for Christians: Making Wise Choices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 142-6, 170.

Defining Birth Control and Contraception

“Birth control” refers to the broad category of interventions designed to preclude procreation despite participation in sex.⁵ “Contraception,” a subset of birth control, refers to the use of artificial means to preclude the establishment of a conceptus resulting from sexual intercourse.⁶ Contraception may take the form of the implementation of a device (e.g., a barrier), the introduction of an artificial hormone (e.g., “the pill”), or the use of a chemical such as a spermicide. Other birth control measures include *coitus interruptus*; wherein intercourse is interrupted prior to ejaculation. Sterilization is a permanent form of contraception wherein one receives a surgical procedure resulting in an inability to reproduce.

The Pro-Natalist Viewpoint of Scripture

Scripture variously describes children as a tremendous gift from God. David lamented at God’s blessing upon his enemies when he wrote, “You fill their womb with treasure; they are satisfied with children, and they leave their abundance to their infants” (Ps. 17:14).⁷ Solomon similarly identified children as a multifaceted blessing:

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one’s youth.
Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!
He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3-5)

Whereas the people of Israel were the Lord’s heritage (Deut. 32:9), children are the heritage of their parents through which God gives provision and protection (cf. Prov. 17:6). Children are a reward: “The fruit of the womb, children, are a reward or recompense given by Yahweh as a token of His favour, as an inheritance to His favoured ones.”⁸ Children, therefore, are to be greatly desired by God’s covenant people.⁹

Conversely, the Bible presents barrenness as a “deep personal tragedy,” as with the account of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:2-20.¹⁰ Hannah’s barrenness is a source of shame and reproach (vv. 6-7; cf. Gen. 30:1) and profound affliction (v. 10) that is remedied by a child given by the sovereign hand of God (vv. 12-20; cf. Gen. 18:9-15; 23:26; Exod. 23:26; Judg. 13:2-3). After having conceived John the Baptist, Elizabeth proclaimed, “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.” (Luke 1:25) In a few instances, Scripture presents infertility as a curse or

⁵ Darlene F. Weaver, “Birth Control” in Joel B. Green ed., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 101.

⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, Jay T. Smith, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 23-4.

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical citations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

⁸ Charles A. Briggs, Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1906–1907), 458.

⁹ The Septuagintal translation of Ps. 127:5 (i.e., 126:5) makes this point even more explicit: “Blessed is the man who will fulfill his desire for them” (author’s trans.).

¹⁰ David E. Van Reken, “Barrenness,” in Walter A. Elwell ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 265.

consequence of sin. For example, when Michal despised David's exuberant worship, God punished her with infertility (2 Sam. 6:16-23; cf. Gen. 20:17-18; Hos. 9:7, v. 14).

The NT does not seek to alter the pro-natalist viewpoint presented in the pages of the OT. Indeed, the NT presupposes the ongoing validity and relevance of the OT moral law and, therefore, the burden of proof rests upon those who would seek to modify the normative position of Scripture. While Paul upholds the gift of singleness (1 Cor. 7:6-7), he recognizes the importance of marriage, including regular marital relations, and the normativity of children (1 Cor. 7:1-5; Eph. 6:1, v. 4). Whereas Paul does not explicitly mention any form of birth control, he rejected any notion of marital celibacy except for infrequent periods of focused prayer (1 Cor. 7:5).

The Relevance of Onan's Sin

The account of Onan and Tamar in Genesis 38:8-11 includes the only mention of a form of birth control within the canon. After Tamar's husband Er is put to death by Yahweh, Judah compelled Er's younger brother Onan to take Tamar in levirate marriage (cf. Deut. 25:5-10).¹¹ The levirate law required the deceased's brother to marry the childless widow and produce a son who would carry on his brother's name. This was done for the benefit of the deceased so that "his name will not be blotted out of Israel" (Deut. 25:6). Levirate marriage also had the effect of ensuring protection and provision for the widow. However, while Onan had sexual relations with Tamar, he engaged in *coitus interruptus*. That is, "whenever" (וְכִּי) he engaged in relations with Tamar, he "would ruin his seed on the ground" (Gen. 38:9, author's trans.).¹² Onan's rationale was self-centered as he did not want to produce a child who would legally belong to his deceased brother (Gen. 38:9) and who would thereby possess a stake in Judah's estate.¹³ Because Onan's actions were "wicked in the sight of the LORD," he put Onan to death (v. 10).

Various evangelical interpreters have suggested that the severity of Yahweh's response to Onan was not owed to his utilization of *coitus interruptus* per se but his attempt to circumvent his duty under the levirate law. For example, Dennis Hollinger appealed to the view he perceives to be that of "most biblical scholars" saying, "The sin was neither masturbation nor *coitus interruptus*, but rather the failure of Onan to practice the Levirate Law... Thus, the text has no real bearing on contraception, since in the context there is a very specific responsibility for a very specific condition."¹⁴ This conclusion, however, does not adequately take into account the levirate law, the language used to describe Onan's sin, the moral connotation of Onan's actions, or the broader sexual ethics required by God's covenant people. Further, what Hollinger referred to as "most biblical scholars" must be a reference to most contemporary biblical scholars since the reading affirmed by Hollinger is virtually unknown among pre-modern interpreters.¹⁵

¹¹ Hamilton, drawing upon the fact that Judah did not explicitly tell Onan to marry Tamar, suggests that Judah merely told Onan to engage in sexual relations with Tamar. If his reading of this passage is accurate, the entire account presents a deficient and immoral approach to carrying out the levirate laws—beginning with Judah's admonition and Onan's refusal to procreate. However, given the ubiquity of marriage within this historical context, one may safely argue that marriage was assumed. See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 435.

¹² Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 436; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 367.

¹³ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 362.

¹⁴ Dennis P. Hollinger, "The Ethics of Contraception: A Theological Assessment," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 4 (2013): 686. See also Doriani who asserted "Onan's sin was that he feigned that he would fulfill his duty and then did not." While not different in substance in Hollinger, Doriani's construal still does not account for the death penalty. Daniel Doriani, "Birth Dearth or Bring on the Babies?: Biblical Perspectives on Family Planning," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 12, No. 1 (1993): 33.

¹⁵ Cf. Charles D. Provan, *The Bible and Birth Control* (Monongahela, PA: Zimmer Printing, 1989), 61.

The levirate law prescribes a corporate shaming ritual for those who evade their responsibility to fulfill the stipulations of the law (Deut. 25:8-10). The law does not prescribe the death penalty. Scripture describes Onan as having “ruined” his seed using a verb that “signifies an act of ruthless destruction” (Gen. 38:9).¹⁶ The verb may be owed to viewing Onan’s actions as tantamount to murder since he sought to prevent conception, as Calvin explained: “For this [i.e., Onan’s actions] is to extinguish the hope of the race and to kill before he is born the hoped-for offspring.”¹⁷ Brian Harrison noted that “If simple refusal to give legal offspring to his deceased brother were, according to Genesis 38, Onan’s only offence [sic], it seems extremely unlikely that the text would have spelt out the crass physical details of his contraceptive act (cf. v. 9).”¹⁸ That is, the relevant account is unusually explicit. In referring to other narratives of a sexual nature, Scripture typically depicts events far more modestly, often through euphemism (e.g., Gen. 4:1; 6:4). Harrison noted further, “Broadly speaking, the sacred writers’ disapproval of different kinds of genital activity increases with the degree of explicitness with which they are described.”¹⁹ Moses may have intended to demonstrate the extraordinary sinfulness of Onan’s behavior through the explicit depiction of his actions.

Onan’s behavior was also a rejection of the natural order God has established in creation. Sexual intercourse naturally results in procreation, and thus, the law prohibits marital relations during a woman’s menstrual period and prescribes severe punishments for those who engage in such an act (Lev. 18:6; 20:18). The expectation of Scripture is that God’s image bearers cooperate with and obey the natural order established by God. Homosexual relations, wrote Paul, is the exchanging of “natural relations for those that are contrary to nature” (Rom. 1:26) and is thus forbidden. While God did not design marital relations solely for procreation, and although there may be natural windows of time wherein conception is not possible (e.g., intercourse while pregnant, post-menopause relations), the gift of a child is the conventional result of marital relations for couples of childbearing age. Onan’s behavior was a repudiation of the natural order, even if it was motivated by covetousness. It would seem, therefore, that God’s punishment of Onan was predicated upon several aspects of Onan’s dealings with Tamar, including how he sought to preclude procreation.

How should the account of Onan influence the attitude of God’s people toward birth control? At a minimum, given the severity with which God punished Onan and the general biblical expectation that humanity affirms the natural order, birth control should be evaluated with suspicion. Since the text indicates a selfish and corrupt motivation behind Onan’s actions, God’s people should examine their motivations for the potential use of birth control. If one desires to utilize birth control for the mere convenience of not conceiving a child, his behavior is not altogether different from Onan’s and is out of step with how the Scripture regards children.

¹⁶ J. Conrad, “ $\tau\eta\sigma\psi$,” in G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 16, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 584.

¹⁷ John Calvin, “Genesis Commentary Volume 2: Genesis 38:1-30,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed November 3, 2022, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.html>. It should be observed that the standard editions of Calvin’s *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* published by Baker Books omit a significant portion of Calvin’s comments on Gen. 38:9 and omit altogether his explanation of v. 10. In correspondence via social media, Calvin scholar Jon Balsarak explained to the author that this omission is likely owed “To the Calvin Translation Society editors feeling the content inappropriate given its sensitive nature.”

¹⁸ Brian W. Harrison, “The Sin of Onan Revisited,” *Living Tradition* 67 (1996), http://rtforum.org/lt/lt67.html#_ftnref16.

¹⁹ Harrison, “The Sin of Onan Revisited.”

Toward a Biblical View of Birth Control

The remarkably high view of children affirmed by Scripture stands in glaring contrast to modern secular attitudes, which suggest children are an undue burden upon both parents and the environment. For example, in her volume entitled *How to Be Childless*, Rachel Chrastil argued that intentional childlessness contributes to human flourishing since it alleviates human suffering, overpopulation, dwindling natural resources, and “the unhappiness of human experience.”²⁰ Chrastil’s title divulges something about childlessness that betrays her argumentation. If childlessness were a key contributor to human flourishing, it is unlikely that a twenty-first-century author would need to write a book entitled *How to Be Childless*. Moreover, was Chrastil’s position accepted by a significant margin of society, it would lead to societal collapse and, thus, human demise.²¹ Childlessness is only suggested as a means unto human flourishing within a society that largely rejects intentional childlessness. Chrastil’s viewpoint, while seemingly gaining traction in the West, has not been received by evangelicals.

Among evangelicals, several views on birth control are represented. Some reject the use of birth control in favor of so-called “Natural Family Planning” (i.e., NFP). NFP involves engaging in selective abstinence during a woman’s ovulation period (i.e., the “rhythm method”). Others reject birth control altogether and leave the matter of procreation entirely up to the providence of God, and still, others choose to utilize some form of birth control.²² Even then, the motivations for using birth control by evangelicals vary. One may conceive of myriad health conditions that render childbearing perilous for a woman (e.g., a congenital heart defect).²³ The biblical emphasis on the preservation of human life renders birth control in this situation effectively uncontroversial.²⁴ However, given the exceptional nature of a life-threatening condition, for most evangelicals who use some form of birth control, the preservation of life is not the motivating factor.²⁵ Instead, these evangelicals seek the preclusion of life while enjoying marital intimacy.

Does implementing non-abortifacient birth control constitute a repudiation of the Bible’s pro-natalist view of children? That is, how can one affirm that children are a God-given “treasure,” “heritage,” and “reward” while seeking to intentionally avoid the same? Daniel Doriani has provided three lines of argumentation in this regard. First, he observed that significant health considerations might render pregnancy dangerous.²⁶ This is hardly an argument for birth control since, statistically, the vast majority of women who utilize contraception are not doing so due to reasons pertaining to illness and disease.²⁷

²⁰ Rachel Chrastil, *How to Be Childless: A History and Philosophy of Life Without Children* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2019), 136. See also the anti-natalism that has become a key policy of some environmentalists. E.g., David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008).

²¹ See for example the problems introduced in Japanese society owing to a collapsing birthrate. Noriko O. Tsuya, “Below-Replacement Fertility in Japan: Patterns, Factors, and Policy Implications” in Ronald R. Rindfuss, Minja K. Choe eds., *Low and Lower Fertility: Variations across Developed Countries* (New York: Springer, 2015), 87-106.

²² See Mary Pride, *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality*, 25th Anniv. ed. (Fenton, MO: Home Life Books, 2010).

²³ R. M. Wald et al., “Pregnancy and contraception in young women with congenital heart disease: General considerations,” *Pediatrics & Child Health* 16, no. 4 (April 2011): 25-9, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3076183/>.

²⁴ The Roman Catholic Church, which has affirmed what is arguably the staunchest anti-contraception position, has afforded its members the ability to take the “lesser evil” when life is at stake. See Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae*,” Libreria Editrice Vaticana, accessed October 30, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html.

²⁵ Kimberly Daniels et al., “Contraceptive Methods Women Have Ever Used: United States, 1982–2010,” National Health Statistics Reports, last modified February 14, 2013, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr062.pdf>.

²⁶ Doriani, “Birth Dearth or Bring on the Babies?,” 34.

²⁷ Daniels et al., “Contraceptive Methods.”

Life in a post-fall world introduces difficult and complex situations wherein a dogmatic and unrelenting approach to birth control becomes unhelpful or even harmful. The Christian ethical approach known as graded absolutism (i.e., hierarchism) recognizes the reality of unavoidable moral conflict in the post-fall world as well as the necessity of appealing to the hierarchy of moral principles taught in Scripture. It is an approach that affirms the responsibility of one to act upon a higher moral principle when two moral principles conflict.²⁸ For example, the ninth commandment precludes deceit (Exod. 20:16). However, when the Hebrew midwives refused the directive of Pharaoh to murder Israel's unborn males, the midwives disobeyed Pharaoh and lied about the nature of their actions (Exod. 1:15-20). Yahweh excused the deceit of the midwives owing to the higher moral principle of the preservation of life and he rewarded them with families (v. 21). Therefore, it is ethically consistent to reject the normative use of birth control while allowing for exceptional circumstances where life is at stake.

Second, Doriani argued that “1 Timothy 5:8 requires parents to provide for children”; therefore, potential parents must “see to it that the family is able to afford a child.”²⁹ He also observed that the provision Paul references in 1 Timothy 5:8 is not limited to the material realm and likely includes care and spiritual nurture. Indeed, the verb *προνοέω* translated as “provide” in 1 Timothy 5:8 in the English Standard Version, connotes provision that is broader than supplying mere material things.³⁰ Doriani's argument, however, is circular since it assumes that pragmatic considerations should determine the use of birth control. It also neglects the well-established fact that men who have children statistically earn significantly higher salaries than those who do not (i.e., the so-called “fatherhood bonus”).³¹

Suppose a couple conceives despite using some form of birth control. In that case, whether they believe they can provide for the child is irrelevant—they must provide, nonetheless. Despite their efforts to prevent such a gift, God has given a reward, and now the parents must amend their lives to account for the care of a child. Whereas such provision may require great sacrifice, as most parents can attest, God ordained the situation (Eph. 1:11) and has promised to provide for the necessities of life (Matt. 6:25-34). By implication, Doriani's perspective does not consistently view children as a gift but as a liability to potentially mitigate.

The final argument Doriani presented is from “Paul's discussion of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7” in which Doriani asserts “Children limit one's freedom to serve the Lord much as marriage does. Married couples might limit the number of children they have in order to preserve some freedom for service. Just as the decision to marry entails the loss of certain freedoms, so does the decision to have children.”³² Herein Doriani has introduced a principle foreign to the pericope he cited. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:5 that married couples should not deprive one another of marital relations except on the condition of mutual agreement for an appointed time. Paul's use of a conditional conjunction (*εἰ μήτι*) in addition to the conditional particle (*ὅτι*) reflects his reluctance to make this exception.³³ Paul grants permission not for birth control but for temporary sexual abstinence so that a couple might focus on prayer. Again, Doriani has engaged in question-begging as he has assumed that Paul's allowance for temporary abstinence includes birth control. Paul has not suggested that couples limit the number of children they have through

²⁸ Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues and Options*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 18-19; 97-106.

²⁹ Doriani, “Birth Dearth or Bring on the Babies?,” 34. Cf. Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 751-2.

³⁰ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 872. Cf. Rom. 12:17; 2 Cor. 8:21.

³¹ Rebecca Glauber, “Race and Gender in Families and at Work: The Fatherhood Wage Premium,” *Gender & Society* 22, no. 1 (2008): 8-30; Alexandra Killewald, “Reconsideration of the Fatherhood Premium,” *American Sociological Review* 78, no. 1 (2012), 96-116.

³² Doriani, “Birth Dearth or Bring on the Babies?,” 34.

³³ Paul Gardener, *1 Corinthians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 301.

birth control so that they may focus on important matters of ministry. Moreover, rearing children is a ministry that takes primacy over other responsibilities (1 Tim. 5:8).

The fundamental question is how does one harmonize the Bible's view that children are a gift, reward, heritage, and treasure with the use of birth control? Could it be that the evangelical acceptance of birth control is owed more to the influence of secular culture than to the Bible's teaching? Wayne Grudem suggested that merely because something is a gift, it is neither wise nor necessary to seek to maximize it.³⁴ However, there is a considerable distinction between maximizing a gift and openness to receive one as God wisely provides. Therefore, the position that is the most consistent with the way the text of Scripture presents children is that of the couple who treats the possibility of conceiving a child with an open hand, allowing the Lord to provide at his discretion. This open-handed approach maximizes the freedom of a couple to enjoy each other as God has ordained while placing trust in the God who has promised that his decisions are good (Rom. 8:28).

Because many evangelicals take a permissive view on birth control, significant caution must be used in addressing the issue within the context of marriage counseling. If, for example, a local church understands birth control to be a matter of adiaphora, care should be exercised to respect the decision of the elder board to maintain the unity of the church (Eph. 4:3). Just as with many contentious theological issues, matters of a secondary or tertiary nature may be important but are nonetheless to be treated with care so as not to provoke disunity.

Conclusion

This study has shown that while the use of birth control is increasingly common among evangelicals, birth control is generally contrary to the pro-natalist viewpoint espoused in Scripture. Scripture describes children as a blessing, heritage, reward, and treasure (e.g., Pss. 17:14; 127:3-5); therefore, God's covenant people should greatly desire children. The lone biblical account dealing with birth control (i.e., the account of Onan in Gen. 38:8-11) casts it in a negative light and implies that it is contrary to the will of God and the natural order. Subsequently, an open-handed approach permits God to provide children at his discretion and accounts for the biblical depiction of children as a blessing.

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³⁴ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 754-5.

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Jesus: The Ultimate Prophet Like Moses

Christian Mathis

For centuries, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian interpreters have arrived at various conclusions about the prophet(s) spoken of in Deuteronomy 18:15-22. The Jewish consensus generally holds that God's promise here is non-messianic and refers to a class of prophets that would succeed Moses.¹ Islam, on the other hand, believes that Mohammed was the prophet like Moses. Summarizing the state of modern biblical scholarship on this issue and the loss of confidence in a messianic reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jim R. Sibley writes – “So it comes as no surprise that no consensus exists among modern scholars regarding the correct interpretation...The positions can be categorized as (1) nonmessianic, (2) indirectly messianic, and (3) directly messianic.”² For those who believe in the inspiration, inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture, the question is whether Moses intended to speak of merely a class of prophets or a class and an ultimate prophet like Moses.

Having demonstrated the need for this study, this essay will argue that though Deuteronomy 18:15-22 has a class of prophets in view, Moses also emphasizes one ultimate prophet like himself, who is the Messiah. To prove this, it is necessary to consider the following levels of argumentation: first, the grammar and syntax of Deuteronomy 18:15-22, second, the biblical evidence for the expectation of one ultimate prophet like Moses, and finally, the ways in which Jesus was the ultimate prophet like Moses. Careful examination of this prophecy and its development throughout the Scriptures will show that Moses and the rest of the biblical writers understood the prophet like Moses to be the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Grammar and Syntax of Deuteronomy 18:15-22

In the immediate context of God's promise to raise up a prophet or prophets, the question is “how will Israel know God's will as they enter the land?” The Israelites had requested a mediator to speak to them on God's behalf lest they die (Ex. 20:18-19; Deut. 5:22-26; 18:16-17), and God responded to their request by promising to raise up “a prophet” [נָבִיא]. Grammatically, נָבִיא is singular, but Hebrew commonly uses the singular as a collective. Within the immediate context of Deuteronomy 18 as well the broader of context of chapters 13 and 17, Deuteronomy 13, 17, there is precedent for the collective use of נָבִיא. In Deuteronomy 13, the context indicates that נָבִיא is being used in a collective sense. In

¹ Jim R. Sibley, “Deuteronomy 18:15-19: The Prophet Like Moses,” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, eds. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 325.

² *Ibid.*, 327.

Deuteronomy 17 and 18 Moses uses the Hebrew words for king, judge, priest, and diviner in their singular forms with reference to a plurality of each throughout Israel's generations. That Deuteronomy 18 contrasts נָבִיא (v. 15) with הַנְּבִיאִים (vv.20-22) furthers the idea that a plurality of prophets is in view. Having evaluated the evidence for the collective use of נָבִיא, a further examination of the grammar and syntax will provide clarity with regard to the other uses of נָבִיא within the passage.

Grammatically, “a prophet” [נָבִיא] and “to him” [אֵלָיו] are singular in v.15. In addition to the grammar, v. 15 also features a structural narrowing effect. Moses begins the verse emphatically with “a prophet” [נָבִיא], then narrows down progressively to “from your midst” [מִקִּרְבְּךָ], then “from your brothers” [מֵאֶחָיֶךָ], and finally “like me” [כְּמֹנִי]. At the end of the verse, Moses shifts from using the collective singular as seen in the second person singular pronominal suffixes above to using the second person plural verb “you will listen” [תִּשְׁמָעוּ]. If merely a class of prophets was meant here, it would have made sense for Moses to use “to them” [אֵלֵיהֶם] instead of “to him” [אֵלָיו], but Moses used “to him” [אֵלָיו].

The structure and grammar of vv. 17-18 shed light on this issue. In these two verses, the form of the words corresponds to the meaning of the words. In other words, when a word is singular in its form, it is singular (not collective) in its meaning, and when a word is plural in its form, it is plural in its meaning. In light of this evidence, a case can be made for the singular understanding of נָבִיא in vv. 17-18. The grammar and syntax of the passage give credence to the expectation of a class of prophets and one ultimate prophet like Moses.

Other Biblical Evidence for the Expectation of the Ultimate Prophet like Moses

Having demonstrated the legitimacy of the expectation of an ultimate prophet like Moses from the grammar and syntax of Deuteronomy 18:15-22, this essay now focuses on the evidence for this understanding throughout Scripture. The end of Deuteronomy, multiple passages in John's Gospel, and two passages in the book of Acts attest to the biblical writers' understanding of God's promise in Deuteronomy 18. A careful reading of these passages will show that biblical writers and some first-century Jews held to a directly messianic understanding of Deuteronomy 18.

Deuteronomy 34:9-10

Moses begins Deuteronomy 34 by prophetically narrating his own death. After recording the Israelites' mourning, Moses records the beginning of his successor's ministry. Verse 9 indicates that the sons of Israel “listened” [וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ] to Joshua.³ In that sense, Joshua is “like Moses” and like the prophet(s) spoken of in Deuteronomy 18. However, in his description of Joshua, Moses does not write that God put his words in Joshua's mouth or that Joshua spoke all that God commanded him.⁴ Instead, Moses writes that under Joshua the Israelites did all that Yahweh commanded Moses. In v.10 Moses goes on to say, “And there has not yet/again arisen a prophet in Israel ‘like Moses [כְּמֹשֶׁה]’ whom Yahweh knew face to face.” That Moses says there had not “yet/again” [עוֹד] arisen a prophet like Moses in Israel is incredibly significant. Moses portrays Joshua as like him, but even in doing so, he anticipates a prophet to come who is not Joshua, but “a prophet like Moses” par excellence.

³ Moses uses “they listened” [וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ], which comes from the same root as “you will listen” [תִּשְׁמָעוּ] in 18:15. By doing so, Moses emphasizes that Joshua is similar to him.

⁴ Deuteronomy 18:18 would give reason to expect both of these from a “prophet(s) like Moses.”

The prophet “like Moses” in Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18 must be understood in light of Moses’ comments in 34:9-10. It is clear that Moses anticipated the coming of a singular prophet [נָבִי] like him, who would be “a prophet like Moses” in the ultimate sense. In the section above, the grammar and syntax attested to the legitimacy of the collective use of the singular (class of prophets) as well as the legitimacy of understanding some references to the prophet as singular.⁵ Moses’ comments in Deuteronomy 34:9-10 solidify this interpretation, and create a theological expectation that the New Testament writers will pick up on and further develop.

John’s Gospel

The Apostle John wrote his gospel with the stated purpose that his readers would believe that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God; and believing, have life in his name (John 20:31). In the first chapter of John’s gospel, he speaks of John the Baptist, who came as a witness, to bear witness about the Light, that is, Jesus (John 1:6). In 1:19 the Jews send priests and Levites from Jerusalem who question John the Baptist. These men, well aware of the prophetic portions of the Old Testament, ask John a series of questions. First, they asked him “Who are you?” to which John replies, “I am not the Christ (Messiah).”⁶ Secondly, the men ask him, “Are you Elijah?” presumably from their understanding of Malachi 4:5.⁷ John also denies this inquiry into his identity. Finally, the men ask him, “Are you the prophet?” which is undoubtedly a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15-18. John denies this question with a simple “no.” These priests and Levites, some of the most devout and well-read Jews of that time, were not only anticipating a coming Messiah but also a prophet like Moses based on Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18.

In John 6, Passover is drawing near as crowds follow Jesus. Jesus’ desire to feed the crowds initially confused His disciples, but when Simon Peter found a boy with five loaves and two fish, Jesus multiplied the bread and fish such that everyone could eat. Once thousands had eaten their fill and the disciples had collected leftovers, the witnesses declared, “This is truly the Prophet who is come into the world.” (John 6:14) In response, Jesus, knowing they would take him by force to make him king, withdrew. Though these people had a misguided understanding of the Messiah as a political deliverer, they understood Jesus’ identity correctly. They were anticipating “the prophet,” and in light of the miraculous provision of bread Jesus had worked, they would have likely recalled Moses’ role in providing manna in the wilderness.⁸

⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary 4 (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1994) 272. Merrill states, “This order was first spoken in the singular...but the continuing context makes it clear that the term was being used in a collective sense to refer to prophetism as an institution...There is nonetheless a lingering importance to the singular “prophet,” for in late Jewish and New Testament exegesis there was the expectation of an eschatological prophet par excellence who would be either a messianic figure or the announcer of the Messiah (cf. John 1:21, 25; Acts 3:22; 7:37). The ambiguity of the individual and collective both being expressed in the grammatical singular is a common Old Testament device employed to afford multiple meanings or applications to prophetic texts.” See also Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 263. Craigie seems to agree with Merrill in seeing the Messianic interpretation as a later Jewish development. Though there is some ambiguity in Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Deuteronomy 34:9-10 demonstrates that Moses himself looked forward to a prophet “like Moses” par excellence. This was not simply a late Jewish and early Christian exegetical development, and multiple meanings need not be maintained from the grammar. See also J.G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, in *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 302-303. McConville understands a class of prophets rather than an individual.

⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 142-143). Carson notes that first-century Palestine was eagerly awaiting a messiah. “Some expected a Davidic Messiah; others (as at Qumran) expected a priestly Messiah as well, not to mention the coming of ‘the prophet’ (1QS 9:11.” The text at hand and Carson’s work testify to the fact that devout Jews in the first century expected a singular messianic prophet to come as prophesied in Deuteronomy 18. Carson also notes “The promise of a prophet like Moses who would speak the words of God (Deut. 18:15-18) was early taken to refer to a special end-time figure; indeed the Samaritans identified this prophet with the promised Messiah.”

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 271. Carson affirms that these people were referring to Deuteronomy 18:15-19’s prophet like Moses. He also says, “Doubtless Jesus’ provision of so much bread to so many people in a wilderness area prompted some to think of Moses’ role in providing manna.”

Only one chapter later in John 7, Jesus is equating himself with God during the Feast of Tabernacles. In John 7:30-32, the Pharisees and the chief priests are trying to seize Jesus and maybe even kill him. In John 7:37-39, when Jesus stands and cries out on the last day, the great day of the Feast of Tabernacles, he extends the offer to drink the living water that he provides.⁹ Some of the crowd have the same response to this as others had to Jesus' multiplying of the bread and loaves – "This truly is the prophet." Their response demonstrates that Jesus' words about living water likely reminded the crowd of Moses' provision of water from the rock (Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:11).¹⁰ Though the crowd has not connected all the dots, others who heard Jesus' words that day concluded that he was the Christ (Messiah).

John's gospel presents strong evidence of the first-century expectation of a singular prophet like Moses from Deuteronomy 18. It also demonstrates that many understood Jesus to be this prophet. Though John's gospel may not provide a clear account of people calling Jesus the Messiah and the prophet at the same time, the passages and research above prove that the understandings of the two figures were closely related. John's gospel demonstrates that first-century Jews were expecting both a coming Messiah and a prophet like Moses, and some believed Jesus was the Messiah while others believed he was the prophet.

Acts

As the book of Acts records the birth, growth, and endurance of the early church, one of the most prominent features of the narrative are the speeches or sermons of the Apostles. Because the resurrected Christ appeared to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), interpreted to some the things concerning himself in Moses and the prophets (Luke 24:27), and opened the minds of the twelve to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45), it comes as no surprise that Acts records Christ in the Old Testament as a prominent feature of the Apostles' preaching. Peter and Stephen's uses of Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18 in Acts 3:22-23 and 7:37 respectively reveal their understanding of its implications.

In Acts 3, after healing a lame man, Peter seized the opportunity to preach Christ to a crowd at Solomon's portico. On the basis of the Old Testament prophets, he urges Israel to repent so Christ will return and establish times of refreshing (3:20-21).¹¹ Immediately following this reference to the words of God's prophets, Peter quotes Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18, attributing the following words to Moses: "Yahweh will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers; to him you shall listen." When combined with his words in v. 24, it becomes clear that Peter's purpose in quoting Deuteronomy 18, Leviticus 23, and the rest of the prophets is to show that they spoke of Christ and "these days." Peter's use of Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18 proves that he understood the passage not only to refer to a class of prophets but also the ultimate prophet like Moses, who is Jesus Christ.

Acts 6:8-7:60 records a confrontation that leads Stephen to deliver a speech in front of the Sanhedrin that ultimately results in his martyrdom. Men falsely testified that Stephen spoke blasphemous words against Moses and God (6:11), never ceased to speak words against the holy place and the Law (6:13-14), and said that Jesus would alter the customs handed down by Moses (6:14). Stephen used the life and words of this same Moses to indict the Sanhedrin (7:20-53). He calls them stiff-necked and

⁹ Many Old Testament allusions are probably in the mind of Jesus as he makes these statements, but given the brevity and focus of this essay, they cannot all be dealt with.

¹⁰ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 329. Carson correctly argues that this connection of Jesus' words with Moses and the water from the rock is the reason that the crowd cited Deuteronomy 18 in their claim.

¹¹ Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Kregel Academic, 2018), 159.

uncircumcised in heart (7:51) before reminding them that their fathers persecuted and killed the prophets who announced the coming of the Righteous One, “whose betrayers and murderers you have now become (7:52).” The overall thrust of the speech clarifies the implications of his words in 7:37 – “This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’” Though these men accused Stephen of perverting and opposing the teachings of Moses and of God, he demonstrated from the whole of the Old Testament and Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18 specifically, that Moses himself spoke of the prophet like him, the Righteous One that they had rejected (7:37 and 52). Like Moses, the Apostle John, and many first-century Jews, Peter and Stephen understood Deuteronomy 18 to have reference to Christ as the ultimate prophet like Moses.

Jesus as the Ultimate Prophet like Moses

In accord with His promise in Deuteronomy 18, God did in fact raise up a class and/or office of prophets who spoke His word to the Israelites throughout the Old Testament. Some of these prophets were particularly Moses-like in their ministries. Dale Allison observes the overlap between the ministries of Moses and Joshua to be so strong that “we may say that the conqueror of the land is ‘almost a second Moses.’”¹² Jeremiah was also a prophet like Moses in significant ways.¹³ These two men are not portrayed as “like Moses” generally; they are portrayed as “like Moses” according to Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18. Of Joshua, Moses himself wrote, “the sons of Israel listened to him (Deut. 34:9; cf. Deut 18:15),” but in the very next verse he also wrote, “there has not yet arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom Yahweh knew face to face (Deut. 34:10).” Yahweh also said to Jeremiah, “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. (Jer. 1:9; cf. Deut. 18:18),” but the New Testament writers did not view Jeremiah or Joshua as the ultimate prophet like Moses. What sets Jesus apart as the ultimate prophet like Moses? The following section will demonstrate that only Jesus corresponds to Moses in that he also delivered Israel from slavery as the leader of a second exodus, “spoke to God face to face,” and functioned as the mediator of a covenant between God and his people.

Jesus Christ: Israel’s Deliverer and Leader of a Second Exodus

Throughout Matthew’s gospel, Christ is commonly portrayed typologically.¹⁴ One of the most striking examples of this is Matthew’s record of Christ’s infancy narrative (Matt. 1:18-2:23). Just as God delivered Moses from Pharaoh who had planned to kill the baby boys (Ex. 1:10;16; 2:1-10), so he also delivered Jesus from Herod who had likewise planned to kill the baby boys (Matt. 2:12-21).¹⁵ Having set the table for a Mosaic typology, Matthew proceeds to describe Jesus’ deliverance from Herod as a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1 (Matt. 2:15), a passage referring to the nation of Israel as God’s son. Yahweh

¹² Dale C. Allison JR., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 24-26. In these pages, Allison lists numerous instances in which Joshua’s life and ministry resemble Moses’.

¹³ Ibid., 56-57. Allison again observes similarities between the two prophets, especially drawing attention to the likeness of their respective call narratives (Jeremiah 1:1-16; Exodus 3:10-4:19).

¹⁴ Ibid., 140. Allison puts forth six devices commonly used in establishing typology and argues that five out of the six devices are employed in Matthew’s infancy narrative.

¹⁵ Abner Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 134-135. Chou notes the correspondence as evidence for Christ as a second Moses. Also Allison, *The New Moses*, 166-169. Allison notes other typological instances with respect to Christ and Moses. Both Christ and Moses give the law from a mountain (Ex. 19:1-25; Matt. 5-7) and both sojourn in the wilderness (Ex. 2:21-22; Matt. 4:1-11). Still more examples could be given. See also Sibley, “Deuteronomy 18:15-19: The Prophet Like Moses,” 335. Though not from Matthew, Sibley notes that Luke 4:1-2 records Jesus being in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights without eating much like Moses, who was with Yahweh 40 days and 40 nights without eating bread or drinking water (Ex. 24:18; 34:28; Deut. 9:9).

called Israel “My son, My firstborn” when he was displaying his covenant love toward them in the Exodus (Ex. 4:22). In context, Hosea was addressing Israel’s continual sin and predicting the nation’s forthcoming exile to Assyria (Hos. 11:5).¹⁶ Hosea mentions Egypt in 11:1 and 11:5 to draw a parallel between Israel’s former condition in Egypt and their forthcoming exile in Assyria. Simultaneously, Hosea uses Exodus 4:22 as a timely and encouraging reminder of God’s love. He wants to communicate that God will deliver his son, Israel, from Assyrian exile just as he delivered him from Egypt (Hos. 11:11). Earlier in his book, Hosea also speaks of a time of restoration when “the sons of Israel will return and seek Yahweh their God and David their king.” (Hos. 3:5) Because both Israel (Ex. 4:22) and the Davidic king who will be the Messiah (Pss. 2:7; Sam. 13-14) are referred to as God’s son, Hosea uses the corporate solidarity that exists between Israel and their Davidic king to argue for God’s future deliverance of Israel, His son.¹⁷ Chou astutely notes that Hosea connected the idea of a new David (Hos. 3:5) with a new Exodus (Hos. 11:1), and therefore “depicts the new David as the one who, like Moses, will spearhead a new Exodus for Israel.”¹⁸

Matthew, fully aware of Hosea’s theological foresight, picks up the baton in his description of Christ’s infancy narrative. The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 proves that one of Matthew’s main goals is to present Jesus as the ultimate Davidic king. Matthew then uses the idea of corporate solidarity to show that Jesus has the same solidarity with Israel as David did. Because of this, it is clear that Matthew uses Hosea 11:1 to demonstrate that Christ is the true/new David, the Son of God who represents Israel, and also the true/new Moses, “one head (Hos. 1:11)” who will lead Israel in a second exodus (Hos. 11:1).¹⁹ The Exodus under Moses prefigured God delivering His Son, Christ, from Herod. Just as God’s Son, Christ was delivered, so God would also deliver his son, Israel, in a second Exodus under the leadership of his ultimate Son and Israel’s ultimate Davidic King, who is also the true Moses. Neither Joshua, nor Jeremiah, nor any other prophet in Israel’s history has been portrayed as the ultimate David (the representative king of Israel) and the ultimate Moses (the one who leads Israel in a second Exodus). In this way, Christ is in a class of his own as the ultimate prophet like Moses.

Jesus Christ: God Himself

Deuteronomy 34:10 and Numbers 12:1-9 set Moses in a class of his own as a prophet “whom Yahweh knew face to face,” with whom Yahweh spoke “mouth to mouth, and who beheld “the form of Yahweh.” Certainly, the ultimate prophet like Moses would need to resemble Moses in these unique ways. Deuteronomy 34:9 records that under Joshua, the Israelites did all that Yahweh had commanded Moses, not all that Yahweh spoke to Joshua mouth to mouth. In Jeremiah 1:9, Yahweh puts his words in Jeremiah’s mouth, but we do not anywhere get mention of Jeremiah knowing Yahweh face to face or beholding the form of Yahweh.

In John’s gospel, Jesus is repeatedly portrayed as God. John 1:18 says, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” Certainly, Moses saw God in a real way – Yahweh knew him face to face (Deut. 34:10) and he beheld Yahweh’s form (Num.

¹⁶ Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 106-107. To support this, Chou lists a number of instances where Hosea has been making this comparison throughout the book.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 107. The concept of corporate solidarity works itself out in God dealing with the nation as he deals with their representative, the David king. Chou observes that Hosea is using a pattern of “past deliverance to future redemption” that is attested in the book of Psalms (see 74:10-15; 77:14-15). Therefore, he correctly states, “Just as God loved his son and rescued the nation the first time, so his love should drive another rescue.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 108. Chou also notes that this point proves that Hosea connects the Exodus with the Messiah.

¹⁹ Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 108. See also page 135. Here Chou notes that both the infancy narrative and Christ’s death as Passover in Matthew 26:26-30 point to Christ as the leader of a new Exodus as conceptualized in Hosea 1:10-11.

12:8), but John seems to be speaking of seeing God in an ultimate way, an unveiled or unmediated way. Only Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Word, who was with God and was God in the beginning, has “beheld” or “seen” God in this way. Moses knew God face to face and beheld Yahweh’s form in some sense, but Jesus Christ is God Himself.

Numbers 12 portrays Moses’ unique relationship with Yahweh. Yahweh contrasts his way of relating to “a prophet” (Num. 12:6) with his way of relating to his servant, Moses (12:7). Unlike the other prophets of Moses’ time, whom God would speak to via visions and dreams, God spoke to Moses mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles (Num. 12:8). In his earthly ministry, Christ was a prophet like Moses insofar as God spoke his very words through Christ just as he spoke mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles to Moses. The words of Jesus in John 12:49 demonstrate this clearly – “For I did not speak from Myself, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me.” His words in John 14:10 emphasize the same reality – “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.” Both Jesus and Moses spoke God’s very word, they both had works that verified their words, Jesus’ words were the Father’s words because he and the Father are one (John 10:30). Because Jesus is God, his role was more than that of a prophet or mediator without being anything less than a prophet or mediator. Jesus is the ultimate prophet like Moses insofar as he knew God ultimately because he himself was God.

Jesus Christ: Mediator of a Better Covenant

Unlike his successor Joshua, Moses mediated a covenant between God and his people. As Yahweh spoke with Moses mouth to mouth, so he put his own words in Jeremiah’s mouth (Jer. 1:9). Like Moses, Jeremiah testified of a new covenant to come, but Jeremiah did not mediate the covenant he spoke of. As Moses’ last days draw near, Yahweh tells him that he has not given Israel “a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.” (Deut. 29:4) Yahweh also tells Moses that after he dies and Yahweh brings Israel “into the land flowing with milk and honey which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them and spurn Me and break My covenant (Deut. 31:20-21). Eventually though, Moses was told, “Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.” (Deut. 30:6)

The prophet Ezekiel would later pick up and develop Moses’ forward-reaching theology, and describe a future restoration in which God would give Israel “a new heart and put a new spirit” within them and “remove the heart of stone” from their flesh and give them “a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26).” Jeremiah also picked up Moses’ forward-reaching theology, and wrote of the same period of restoration from a different perspective – “Behold...I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I cut with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke...I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it. (Jer. 31:31-33).”

By virtue of Jesus’ perfect once for all sacrifice (Heb. 9:11-22; Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20), the author of Hebrews identifies him as the superior mediator of the superior covenant (Heb. 8:6-13; cf. Jeremiah

31:31-34).²⁰ This is not to portray Moses negatively, but to portray Christ as Moses par excellence.²¹ The author of Hebrews uses Numbers 12 to demonstrate that though Moses was great and unparalleled in his time, Christ is superior (Heb. 3:5-6). Moses was not the builder of the house in which he served, the creator of all things, the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his nature, or a priest forever. Moses mediated the Law, the Old Covenant, that pointed to the need for a new covenant, but the Law made nothing perfect. Christ on the other hand is a high priest who sat down at the right hand of God after making a once for all sacrifice that perfected for all time all those who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:13-14).

The new covenant is a better covenant because it has a better mediator and better promises. Because Christ reigns and mediates forever from the true tabernacle, God's very presence in heaven (Ps. 110:1; 4), he is able to save forever those who draw near to God through him (Heb. 7:25). Unlike the Old Covenant that Moses mediated, in the New Covenant, all of God's people have the law written on their hearts, all of God's people will know him, and through the blood of the true sacrifice, Christ Himself, sins are fully and finally forgiven. Moses, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah warned and instructed Israel regarding their sin and covenant breaking, but they could do nothing in themselves to fix Israel's condition. Christ is the ultimate prophet like Moses, Davidic King, Eternal Priest, and Son of God. In the new covenant, He made the perfect sacrifice in his blood, sent the Spirit, is building his church, ever lives to intercede for his people, and will return and accomplish Israel's restoration in a way that the prophets of old could only speak of. "God, having spoken long ago...in the prophets in many portions and many ways...in these last days spoke to us in his Son (Heb. 1:1)."

Conclusion

The context, grammar, and syntax of Deuteronomy 18:15-22 indicate that Moses spoke of God's promise to raise up a class of prophets and an individual, the ultimate prophet like Moses. Moses confirms this understanding by his concluding remarks about a prophet like him in Deuteronomy 34:9-10. The subsequent biblical writers and first-century witnesses of Jesus understood Deuteronomy 18:15; 18 to speak of him. Finally, though other Israelite prophets such as Joshua and Jeremiah were "like Moses" in significant ways, only God's Son, the Messiah, Israel's Davidic King, Jesus, is the ultimate Prophet like Moses.

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²⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 239-241.

²¹ Ibid., 117-119. Schreiner shows that the author of Hebrews uses Moses' uniqueness and greatness as a way to demonstrate just how unparalleled Christ is.

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The Shepherd-Prophet:

Confrontative Ministry and the Evangelicalism of Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Gregory W. Mathis

ABBREVIATIONS

ARM | *All Round Ministry*

Autobiography | *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*

LMS | *Lectures to My Students*

MTP | *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*

NPSP | *New Park Street Pulpit*

NT | *New Testament*

S&T | *The Sword and the Trowel*

Charles Haddon Spurgeon perceived himself fundamentally as the pastor of a local church. His living out his convictions on the brevity of credentialism, the necessity of personal sacrifice, and the centrality of pulpit ministry serve to highlight his prime source of contentment: the shepherding of a New Testament congregation. And yet it would be the height of historical malpractice to reduce Spurgeon's influence to only those who attended the Metropolitan Tabernacle. His prolific writing ministry and the publication of his weekly sermons served to create an environment in which even his pulpit ministry to his own congregation produced an unprecedented and wide dissemination of his thought. Spurgeon's reputation for boldness thus came squarely into view as he was heard, read, and as he interacted during occasions of theological upheaval.

An examination of Spurgeon's differing approaches to his inward-facing responsibilities at the Metropolitan Tabernacle and his outward-facing tack toward the culture promises to reveal salutary gleanings in terms of understanding his ecclesiology. How did Spurgeon view his confrontative responsibility to his church? How did he view his charge to influence the culture around him and even to inculcate a certain variety of evangelicalism in England? And, importantly for the present work, what does the 'difference' between these results teach about his doctrine of the church? What follows will contemplate Spurgeon's practices of confronting error both within his church and in the broader evangelical world in order to argue that Spurgeon can be helpfully understood as a pre-eminent shepherd-prophet. As a shepherd, he recognized his unique responsibility to confront error at home through preaching and discipline. Outside the Tabernacle, he engaged public error as a kind of prophet, delivering a message of truth, but not arrogating to himself the status of "Baptist bishop."

Definitions of Terms

The present work is concerned with evaluating specifically the posture and strategy of Charles Haddon Spurgeon in his confrontative ministry, both relative to the Metropolitan Tabernacle and toward

the outside culture. As a result, the author understands “shepherd” and “prophet” as terms of utility. These terms carry a pedagogical weight as they explicate his two-pronged posture toward error. “Shepherd” is used below to refer to Spurgeon’s ministry toward those uniquely entrusted to his spiritual care at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.¹ “Prophet” refers to his outward-facing efforts to bring his influence to bear in broader Christendom.² Thus, it is used here in the colloquial sense to refer to someone willing to speak a difficult truth, at great personal cost, for the edification of God’s people at large.

This utility, though, bears some asymmetry demanded by the New Testament situation in which Spurgeon ministered. One should not read the term “prophet,” in other words, to mean precisely the office given to certain Old Testament figures. Rather, “prophet” speaks to Spurgeon’s general ability to convey a message of truth to those over whom he had no direct authority, often at great personal cost. On the other hand, the term “shepherd” carries a greater degree of precision as Spurgeon is rightly understood as the literal New Testament shepherd of a specific local church. Such a clarification is important, but should not detain readers any further in view of the following examination of his ministry and thought.

Another important clarification involves the meaning of the term “confrontative ministry.” This work employs the term because it is sufficiently narrow as to broker a treatment of his methods in confronting error and also sufficiently broad to prevent the discussion from being limited to such ecclesiological features as church discipline, strictly. “Confrontative ministry,” therefore, encapsulates both how Spurgeon carried out his narrower, biblically defined ministry of confrontation among his own congregation as well as how he comported himself toward the larger culture. At times, the phrases “confrontation” and “restorative ministry” are employed as they depend on the assumption that all biblical confrontation is properly executed with an eye toward Gospel restoration.³

Spurgeon the Shepherd

Spurgeon’s Self-Conception of the Pastoral Ministry

Coming of age during a time when formal education was not open to dissenters such as Spurgeon, he equipped himself through voracious reading and study. He had long been an autodidact, first gleaning from the Puritan works of his grandfather’s collection as a child.⁴ So desirous to both eschew credentialism and to embrace sacrificial ministry was Spurgeon that he considered college training as a possible hindrance to his labors and demonstrated his willingness to serve his first church for only paltry

¹ Allison summarized the responsibilities uniquely entrusted to pastors under three headings: “the communication of sound doctrine and the Christlike practice that flows from it,” the leadership of the church, prayer, and “shepherding the flock of God.” Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 219-23.

² Though some, like Grudem, hold to a continuationist view of the gift of prophecy in contemporary times, this debate is beyond the scope of the present consideration. “Prophet” is used here in the more colloquial manner referring to one who is willing to speak a truth at great personal cost among those over whom he has no ultimate authority. Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 1031ff.

³ In his seminal work of the Biblical Counseling movement, Jay Adams underscored not only the role of confrontation in producing health in believers, but also the corporate church’s role in confrontation. He pivoted to emphasize that ‘nouthetic’ ministry (from the Greek word included in Romans 15:14) is “particularly the world of the ministry.” Undergirding Adams’s entire commentary was the goal of benefit to the one confronted and a motivation of love in the one doing the confrontation. Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 41-55. Allison likewise acknowledges that the goal of confrontation in church discipline is always centered on restoration and reconciliation. Allison, 184-85.

⁴ Ernest W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (Arlington Heights, IL: Christian Liberty Press, 2007), 4. Bacon recorded that Spurgeon was six years old when he discovered the Puritan works in his grandfather’s attic. David Bebbington referred to him as “a very bookish man.” David Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: the Age of Spurgeon and Moody*, A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements, and Ideas in the English-Speaking World (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 41.

remuneration.⁵ He likewise only reluctantly submitted to his church's desire to ordain him and never preferred the title "reverend," opting instead for, simply, "pastor."⁶ The attitude expressed when he quipped, "the boast of pedigree is common but silly" served him well as he grasped for a Godward source of sufficiency in the face of so grand a task for one of so unimpressive a background.⁷

These observations serve to highlight the truth that Spurgeon approached his task with a sense of humility. Yet this humility concerning self did not impede his clear vision of the glory of his calling. Spurgeon loved the local church. After his conversion he reflected, "I felt that I could not be happy without fellowship with the people of God. I wanted to be wherever they were, and if anybody ridiculed them, I wished to be ridiculed with them."⁸ Even more palpably, he expressed that "when I was first converted to God, if the Lord had said 'I have taken you into My house . . . and you shall be a door-mat for the saints to wipe their feet on,' I should have said, 'Ah happy shall I be if I may but take the filth off their blessed feet, for I love God's people.'"⁹ He went on to say that the thought of pastoring "didn't even come into my head."¹⁰ In short, Spurgeon gave no evidence of ambitiously clamoring after the pastorate; he perceived that the pastorate should seek the man. When evaluating his treatment of confrontative ministry later, bearing in mind this early love for the church and suppleness of heart toward her people proves important.

Believing strongly in congregational church government, Spurgeon likewise held a special esteem for the pastor of the church.¹¹ He spoke of himself as "captain of a vessel," responsible for the well-being of those aboard, as it were.¹² The authority of the shepherd derives from the call of God himself. Teaching on the call to the ministry, Spurgeon instructed his Pastor's College students that "the sheep will know the God-sent shepherd; the porter of the fold will open it to you, and the flock will know your voice."¹³ He grounded his personal shepherding charge from God in this same vernacular, noting that only God's call brought him to the Metropolitan Tabernacle and apart from God's call, "nothing else ever will" remove him from that post.¹⁴ Grasping Spurgeon's understanding of authority, calling, and the charge to steer well the "vessel" of the church retains a certain importance when surveying how he understood the biblical warrant to engage in confrontation.

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography: The Full Harvest*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 2018), 208, 194.

⁶ Arnold A. Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 47. In a more forward tone, Spurgeon ridiculed the practice of pastors becoming reverends, listing the impulse toward ordination under the title "Fragments of Popery among Nonconformists." Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel: A Record of Combat with Sin and Labour for the Lord* (London, UK: Passmore and Alabaster, 1874), 265.

⁷ Quoted in Russell H. Conwell, *Life of Charles H. Spurgeon: The World's Greatest Preacher* (Philadelphia, PA: Edgewood Publishing Company, 1892), 48.

⁸ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 145.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Gregory A. Wills, "The Ecclesiology of Charles H. Spurgeon: Unity, Orthodoxy, and Denominational Identity," *Baptist History and Heritage* 34, no. 3 (1999): 69.

¹² Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Sermons Preached and Revised by C. H. Spurgeon*, vol. 7 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970), 257. Spurgeon in this record of a church meeting was polemicizing against other forms of church government and arguing for the independency model of the Baptists.

¹³ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: Complete & Unabridged* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1954), 33.

¹⁴ *MTP* 7:257.

Fundamental to Spurgeon's theology of ministry was, of course, exposition.¹⁵ This emphasis on preaching should in no way, however, diminish other valuable aspects of Spurgeon's work such as his active pastoral care and personal sacrifices made in the way of discharging his call.¹⁶ Chang has related helpfully that Spurgeon's ministry was that of a pastor, not merely of a preacher.¹⁷ Yet the jewel of his life's work was seen primarily in the pulpit and it epitomized his self-conception as a shepherd among his flock. The pulpit, for him, was "the Thermopylae of Christendom."¹⁸ It was in Spurgeon's mind "the chief means ordained by God to hold forth his glory generation after generation in a fallen world."¹⁹ It was moreover for Spurgeon the primary means God was pleased to use to win victory in the spiritual battle against the forces of evil.²⁰ And importantly for the present consideration, the ministry of the pulpit was for Spurgeon the ordinary platform from which the shepherd could confront sin and call for life-giving repentance and faith in Christ.

Treated in greater detail below, the pulpit was also where Spurgeon taught on such thorny ecclesiological matters as church discipline and instructed his flock concerning the doctrinal errors of the day. As his primary platform, Spurgeon engaged from the pulpit cultural issues and called for a recognition of God's truth as the only standard of justice and righteousness. Polemicizing against the subjectivism of his day, Spurgeon observed that "the current principle of the present age seems to be, 'some things are either true or false according to the point of view from which you look at them' . . . truth is of course true, but it would be rude to say that the opposite is a lie."²¹ He seemed also to be self-aware of his reputation for boldness. He admitted as much in his robust defense of "Calvinism" as a "nickname" for the Gospel.²² His zeal in confronting cultural error and contending for theological distinctives is apparent, yet he was no boor. In the same address in LMS, Spurgeon encouraged his students to be "ready to offend our best supporters, to alienate our warmest friends, sooner than belie our consciences"²³ and equally admonished them not to go looking for a fight, as many men are tempted to do. Men who fall prey to such a temptation "are theologians of such warm, generous blood, that they are never at peace till they are fully engaged in war."²⁴

¹⁵ Nettles has addressed sufficiently the question concerning whether Spurgeon was properly an expositor. He concluded that Spurgeon's brand of exposition was executed "in Puritan fashion, using the whole Bible and all its doctrines in the unfolding of any one portion of Scripture." Moreover, exposition had a place in the services of the Metropolitan Tabernacle separate from the sermon. This "running homily" would set his narrower preaching text in its proper context. Spurgeon himself asked, "what are sermons but commentaries?" In summary, Nettles concluded that "Spurgeon would be surprised for anyone to accuse him of anything less than exposition. Often he did more, but, in his own perception, he never did less." Tom J. Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2015), 157.

¹⁶ Indeed, Spurgeon's ministry included various aspects that marked evangelicals broadly, including, as DiPrima has noted, his vibrant evangelical activism. See Alex J. DiPrima, "An Eagerness to Be Up and Doing: The Evangelical Activism of Charles Haddon Spurgeon," (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020). Moreover, Spurgeon demonstrated his willingness to intercede practically for those under his spiritual charge by ministering, at great personal risk to himself, during the cholera epidemic of 1854. See Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 272ff. No mere aloof preacher, Spurgeon was a pastor in full.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Chang, *Spurgeon the Pastor: Recovering a Biblical & Theological Vision for Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2022), 21.

¹⁸ Quoted in Chang, *Spurgeon the Pastor*, 21.

¹⁹ Nettles, 174.

²⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Greatest Fight in the World: The Final Manifesto* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2014), 37. Addressing fellow preachers, Spurgeon exhorted: "My topics have to do with our life-work, with the crusade against error and sin in which we are engaged. I hope that every man here wears the red cross on his heart, and is pledged to do and dare for Christ and His Cross, and never to be satisfied till Christ's foes are routed and Christ himself is satisfied . . . Oh, to be found good soldiers of Jesus Christ!"

²¹ Spurgeon, *LMS*, 220.

²² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Sermons*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2020), 88-89. "And I have my own private opinion, that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and him crucified, unless you preach what now-a-days is called Calvinism. I have my own ideas, and those I always state boldly. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism. Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else."

²³ Spurgeon, *LMS*, 226.

²⁴ Spurgeon, *LMS*, 224.

What, though, was the impetus behind Spurgeon's willingness to offend and confront in the pulpit? It is within Spurgeon's primary emphasis on pulpit ministry that one may perceive the theological nucleus of his thought and practice. Evangelical conversionism represented for Spurgeon the *telos* of ministry.²⁵ Indeed, Wills found that Spurgeon's entire ecclesiology is properly understood as resting "on the experience of regeneration or the new birth."²⁶ Spurgeon's desire to see conversions arise from faithful Gospel preaching drove his posture of catholicity toward other denominations and contributed to the production of a rather mere ecclesiology on many fronts.²⁷ Yet this conversionism situated Spurgeon squarely within one of the primary criteria Bebbington has identified as constitutive of evangelicals.²⁸

Spurgeon's goal thus was not to offend in confrontation, but he was willing to do so because he recognized the inherent offensiveness of his message. He was willing to confront and risk offense, in short, because the prize of seeing conversions through the Gospel remained supreme in his mind. He certainly understood the evangelistic conversation as an instance of needed confrontation. In the *Se&T*, Spurgeon encouraged his readers to see that "to turn every opportunity to account for Jesus is an art which all believers should learn."²⁹ He drew an example of this kind of evangelistic fervor from Horatius Bonar's account of the life of John Milne, noting both the frequent propensity such conversations have to be received as uncouth as well as God's pleasure to work through them:

He had preached one Sabbath on 'The Harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and we are not saved;' and during the course of the following week he saw one of his people walking along with a companion. He went up, and putting his hand on his friend's shoulder, said, "'The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and we are not saved' – are YOU saved?" and immediately passed. His friend's companion said, 'Was not that very forward and uncalled for?' 'No,' said the other, 'it is a most important question.' That question led to a true conversion. Reader, go and do thou likewise.³⁰

Confrontation through Exposition

How, then, does the record of Spurgeon's pulpit ministry specifically dovetail with the notion of confrontative ministry in his ecclesiology? Assuming that the regular warp and woof of preaching itself represents a broader kind of confronting men and women with truth to which a response is demanded, the first specific point of departure would involve a consideration of how he taught on the ministry of

²⁵ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 2003), 104-105. Spurgeon's outlook was radically Gospel-centric. He claimed in a chapter entitled "How to Meet the Evils of the Age," that "We have only to preach the living Gospel, and the whole of it, to meet the whole of the evils of the times."

²⁶ Wills, 67. Wills further suggested that Spurgeon's diminished ecclesiology can be traced in part to this emphasis. So concerned was Spurgeon to win souls to Christ that he was content to partner across denominational lines with those not wholly in step with his personal ecclesiology.

²⁷ The notion of Spurgeon's catholicity merits deeper study. In many respects, he showed himself to be a man of deep nuance or even apparent duality. On one hand, his catholicity served to enable many fruitful partnerships for the purpose of benevolence and Gospel advance. On the other hand, his willingness to divide with the Baptist Union, for instance, demonstrates the limits of the theological latitude he was willing to countenance. In the end, he was even willing to underwrite the decision to leave the Metropolitan Tabernacle in the hands of A. T. Pierson, a Presbyterian. See DiPrima, 182ff. Yet various examples from his preaching discourage any reader from concluding that he was a doctrinal minimalist: "The church unfurls her ensign to the breeze that all may know whose she is and whom she serves. This is of the utmost importance at this present, when crafty men are endeavouring to palm off their inventions. Every Christian church should know what it believes, and publicly avow what it maintains. It is our duty to make a clear and distinct declaration of our principles, that our members may know to what intent they have come together, and that the world also may know what we mean." *MTP* 17:194.

²⁸ See Bebbington, 31-36.

²⁹ *Se&T* 1869:117.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

confrontation. At this juncture, the facts present the researcher with a surprising revelation: Spurgeon completely bypassed many of the hallmark NT passages that pertain directly to confrontation and church discipline (see Table 1).³¹ Indeed, from the twenty-five verses that comprise the NT letter of Jude, for example, Spurgeon preached thirteen sermons. And of those sermons, he bypassed verses 22-23 where Jude called for believers to sometimes take drastic measures to restore the wayward, preaching two sermons on the verses immediately preceding the passage and four sermons on the verses immediately following it (see Table 3). During his entire pulpit ministry, no sermon was preached from Matthew 18:15-19 or Luke 17:3-4, among many others in which church discipline or restorative ministry is clearly in view.³²

Though this seeming pattern of sidestepping the clearest references in the Bible to church discipline, confrontation, and restorative ministry proves rather shocking, certain factors mitigate the impact of this finding. First, one should bear in mind Spurgeon's method of sermon text selection. Had his pattern of exposition been consecutive, the omission of certain passages would heighten questions about selectivity. But Spurgeon intentionally sought to allow the Spirit to guide his weekly text selection.³³ In *LMS*, he encouraged his trainees that they would know they had found the right text "by the signs of a friend. When a verse gives your mind a hearty grip, from which you cannot release yourself, you will need no further direction as to your proper theme."³⁴ Spurgeon's subjective counsel in this arena was not unmoored from prudence; he simultaneously discouraged a "careless accidental pitching upon topics" as well as "a monotonous regularity."³⁵

Second, simply because Spurgeon did not choose these specific texts does not imply that he eschewed teaching on the practice at all. One exemplar sermon on his view of the local church revealed how he instructed his church in the area of church discipline. Using the image of a banner from Canticles 6:4, Spurgeon made the following application to the NT church:

Banners were carried, not merely for distinctiveness, but also to serve the purpose of discipline... So, brethren, in the church of God there must be discipline not only of admission and of dismissal in receiving the converts and rejecting the hypocrites, but the discipline of marshalling the troops to the service of Christ in the holy way in which we are engaged.³⁶

Observations concerning his aptitude for finding specific themes in obscure passages while at the same time bypassing verses that would have treated the same themes in a perspicuous way must be tabled for the moment to see what Spurgeon was 'not' doing. While he did not emphasize the standard-bearing passages in his *MTP* sermons, he certainly did not ignore the theme out of either contempt or neglect.

³¹ Cf. *Textual and Subject Indexes of C. H. Spurgeon's Sermons in the New Park Street and Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1971).

³² As Table 1 demonstrates, Spurgeon definitely treated certain passages where confrontation or restorative ministry are implicated. However, for the majority of the seventeen typical passages selected for examination, Spurgeon only preached from four.

³³ Hovis pointed out how many have criticized Spurgeon's practice of choosing a new text each week. Greg Heisler has noted prudential concerns as well as doctrinal qualms with the practice. See Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 100; Jacob Andrew Hovis, "The Spirit-Led Preaching of Charles H. Spurgeon," (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 58.

³⁴ Spurgeon, *LMS*, 85.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁶ *MTP* 17:195.

Confrontation through Discipline

The second way to examine Spurgeon's ministry of confrontation at the Metropolitan Tabernacle involves surveying the church's practices in the arena of church discipline. Chang has highlighted the respect Spurgeon held for church discipline by noting how such practical matters dovetailed with his general aversion to unapplied, ethereal doctrine.³⁷ In this way, discipline proved to be one conduit through which his "ecclesiology was made real."³⁸ According to the records available, the Metropolitan Tabernacle removed from membership some 2,728 individuals for either non-attendance or otherwise disciplinary exclusion between the years 1856-1892.³⁹ Any qualms about Spurgeon's tendency to overlook typical NT passages on discipline seem to be quelled by the data. A common charge against Christians is that they do not sufficiently practice what they preach; one could say Spurgeon's church in this regard was better at practicing what it did not often preach. It is no hazardous conclusion to suspect that the frequency of membership culls at the Metropolitan Tabernacle represented so vigilant a reminder of the rationale for discipline that regular preaching on the topic was not as necessary then as it might be now in a time so unaccustomed to the practice.

Philosophy and statistics of discipline, however, do not by themselves demonstrate the fullness of pastoral care in this matter. The Tabernacle's willingness to engage in discipline was not divorced from the goals of prudence and love. "In cases of hardship rather than sin, Spurgeon did not recommend their removal, but encouraged his elders to patiently care for these members."⁴⁰ This pastoral reality underscores the shepherding instinct that informed the sensitive matter of exclusion in member care. And this shepherding act served a dual purpose: to call back the wayward and to protect the larger church body from the corruption of hypocrites.⁴¹ The ideal aspiration of the elders was to forestall instances of grievous sin through diligent member care; however, "this was not always possible."⁴² The record thus reveals that the Elders of the Metropolitan Tabernacle were willing to recommend removal both for non-attendance after pursuing such wandering members as well as formal discipline for grievous, public, unrepentant sin. They were likewise willing to so endeavor out of a posture of love and care.

Spurgeon and the Pastors College Conference

Spurgeon's handling of the Pastors College Conference in response to theological controversy deserves special attention because it sheds light into his understanding of his purview of authority. The Pastors College itself had previously been implicated in Spurgeon's mind when the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) proved unwilling to ground its membership sufficiently along evangelical confessional lines. Not wholly satisfied with the settlement which added verbiage about Christian commitment but fell short of further doctrinal clarity, Spurgeon continued in affiliation with the BMS, even becoming a General Committee member in 1867.⁴³ Michael has concluded that this moment "demonstrated his maturity in

³⁷ Geoffrey Chang, "The Militant Ecclesiology and Church Polity of Charles Haddon Spurgeon" (PhD diss, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 12.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Chang's helpful table in Chang, "Militant Ecclesiology," 314-16.

⁴⁰ Chang, "Militant Ecclesiology," 165.

⁴¹ *NPSP* 2:386-387. See also Chang, "Militant Ecclesiology," 167.

⁴² See *NPSP* 2:389, cited in Chang, "Militant Ecclesiology," 168.

⁴³ Larry James Michael, "The Effects of Controversy on the Evangelistic Ministry of C. H. Spurgeon," (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 194.

being able to support it while maintaining basic disagreements,” especially as more and more Pastor’s College men filled the ranks sent out by the BMS in years to come.⁴⁴

This scene presaged the later fracas, however, that involved both associationalism and the Pastor’s College. While the BMS strengthened their membership requirements somewhat, the Baptist denomination removed evangelical verbiage from its constitution, prompting Spurgeon’s years-long response. This response found some of its origins in the Pastor’s College Conference, where Spurgeon spoke a word of warning about the direction of the Baptist Union. Taking such a liberty both signaled that Spurgeon viewed the Conference as existing under his purview. This paper suggests the move also displays Spurgeon’s shepherding tendencies: he sought to reform the organizations directly under his charge. While some may suggest Spurgeon’s eventual decision to dissolve and reconstitute the Conference under explicitly evangelical auspices was an inappropriate expression of authority, the truth was that the Conference was his to lead and direct.⁴⁵

While Spurgeon’s outward-facing comportment, treated below, reveals a contrast, his shepherding of his own organizations demonstrates his restraint. He contemplated leaving the Baptist Union “quietly,” while setting about to reform those under his oversight.⁴⁶ In his mind, the Pastors College and its Conference was not properly a target of prophetic calls to reform; rather, it was an institution, like the Tabernacle, he was responsible to shepherd toward faithfulness. His painful decision to watch students leave over their disapproval proved his resolve to do so.

Conclusions

Though handling the touchstone NT texts on confrontative and restorative ministry in a cursory manner, Spurgeon in no wise ignored the topic. His willingness to address the theme in certain passages uniquely tailored to the discussion, combined with his penchant for finding the theme in other unexpected places demonstrates that he perceived its salience in Scripture. Furthermore, the robust practices of exclusion and member care at the Metropolitan Tabernacle provide a convincing body of counter-evidence to those who would suggest Spurgeon’s “diminished” ecclesiology led him to doctrinal or practical minimalism.⁴⁷ Records of church discipline highlight the Tabernacle’s self-understanding of purview and authority. Moreover, Spurgeon’s willingness to reform the Pastor’s College Conference demonstrated his desire to reform what he could while directing his persuasive influence outward toward the institutions over which he had no authority. His tone in addressing conflict was certainly bold. Yet his goal was not to offend intentionally and he is on record calling for a rejection of the deleterious practices of factious theologians. As a shepherd, he called his flock to Christ. As a shepherd, he directed pastors away from perceived error.

Spurgeon the Prophet

While the shepherding of the Metropolitan Tabernacle represented Spurgeon’s primary platform and specific realm of authority, his reach proved much broader than his own congregation and even his own

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Some eighty students rebelled against this move, refusing to join the newly constituted Pastor’s College Evangelical Association. Michael, 250. Spurgeon wrote to one confidant, “I cannot tell you by letter what I have endured in the desertion of my own men. Ah me! Yes the Lord liveth, and blessed be my rock!” Copy of a letter to Mr. Near, February 21, 1888, Spurgeon’s College, London.

⁴⁶ See Ernest W. Payne, “The Down Grade Controversy: A Postscript,” *Baptist Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (October 1979): 148.

⁴⁷ Wills employed the term “diminished” to describe Spurgeon’s ecclesiology in his journal article. Wills, 67.

city of London. Though it is impossible to separate the two cleanly, Spurgeon's writing ministry and his engagement in public controversy provide the most instructive windows into his broader influence and how he sought to shape evangelicalism. What follows will seek to highlight Spurgeon's quest to inculcate into the broader Christian culture a specific vision for doctrine and practice, arguing that Spurgeon recognized his lack of biblical authority to directly enforce right belief and practice in the same way he was authorized to do so among his own flock. If what preceded this discussion was successful in demonstrating that Spurgeon discharged his biblical call to confront error and sin as a shepherd, the following will seek to demonstrate that he engaged the broader Christian culture as a prophet: someone willing to endure deep personal sacrifice in the way of leveraging his voice to cultivate orthodoxy.

Spurgeon's Writing Ministry

In his biography of Spurgeon, W. Y. Fullerton began his comments on the enduring impact of Spurgeon's sermons by remarking, "great was the influence of Mr. Spurgeon's preaching, it may be questioned whether the influence of his printed sermons was not greater."⁴⁸ Through his printed sermons and no less through his popular magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel* (*S&T*), a record of Spurgeon's engagement with perceived error and cultural trends remains extant. What that record reveals involves matters of aim, tone, and a less obstructed view of Spurgeon's personal opinions.

Furthermore, it is through the lens of the *S&T* that one may notice how Spurgeon's influence afield from the Metropolitan Tabernacle cannot be properly described as accidental. To the contrary, Spurgeon stated in the opening article of the *S&T* his aim: "Our magazine is intended to report the efforts of those Churches and Associations, which are more or less intimately connected with the Lord's work at the Metropolitan Tabernacle and to advocate those views of doctrine and Church order which are most certainly received among us."⁴⁹ Thus, Spurgeon understood himself to be both wielding a certain amount of influence and directing it to specific ends. In the magazine, he was free "to say many things which would be out of place in a discourse."⁵⁰ This proved appropriate for his goals as he expanded on them, noting that "we do not pretend to be unsectarian," and that "we shall not court controversy, but we shall not shun it when the cause of God demands it."⁵¹

His designs on wider influence did not pass unopposed, however. Suspicions of motive began to percolate and were eventually publicized under the antagonistic moniker, "Spurgeonism." The magazine's response to printed charges so captures both the problem and Spurgeon's tack in confrontation that it bears reproducing in length:

A MR. M. COIT TYLER writes to the New York Independent as follows:— "One word about Spurgeonism in general Silently, but rapidly, within the pale of this great Baptist sect in England, and covering all the land with its network of moral power, there is being formed a distinct body of Spurgeonite preachers,— energetic young men trained in Spurgeon's college, imbued with Spurgeon's intense spirit, copying with an unconscious but ludicrous fidelity even the minutiae of Spurgeon's manner of speech, proud of their connection with Spurgeon's name, and in constant communication with the 'Head Centre' in London. More and more is Spurgeon separating himself from the general organisation of the religious world, and even of the Baptist denomination, and

⁴⁸ W. Y. Fullerton, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Biography* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), 173.

⁴⁹ *S&T* 1865:1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

concentrating his work upon his immense Church, his College, and the Churches throughout the kingdom that have taken his pupils for pastors. If this goes on another twenty years, Spurgeonism will be a vast organic and wondrously vitalised body.”⁵²

This instructive passage reveals a few points worth considering. First, the fact that it was published in a New York periodical demonstrates that Spurgeon’s influence was waxing even before the inception of the *S&T*. Second, those surveying Spurgeon’s domestic success perceived him to be constructing something of a sectarian empire.⁵³ And last, Spurgeon’s willingness to confront error boldly and in print mirrors his *modus operandi* during other controversies.

Writing for broader consumption again in the *S&T*, Spurgeon’s third article, published as the first article in the magazine’s second issue of all time, addressed the topic of church discipline. Entitled “A Neglected Duty,” this February 1865 piece sought to encourage pastors among the readership of the magazine to return to the practice of church discipline. And yet, the rationale undergirding Spurgeon’s exhortation was radically founded on his conversionism. Indeed, Spurgeon held that wayward souls should be sought and confronted because of their need to be made right with God again; what’s more, if confrontation does not occur, many will not repent. “If men were not corrupt in heart, they would turn from sin of themselves . . . their nature is so depraved that one sin is a prelude to another, and he who has begun to descend the ladder of iniquity is impelled to continue his downward career.”⁵⁴ In short, love motivates biblical confrontation. Continuing, though, Spurgeon deployed language of Jude 22-23, the very passage conspicuously skipped in his expository treatment of the letter (see Tables 1, 2, and 3). “Brands must be plucked from the burning, for of themselves they will never leave the fire . . . we must, therefore, as Jude puts it, ‘pull them out.’”⁵⁵

If Spurgeon’s tack in confrontation was bold, his heart was soft. He fundamentally believed that confrontation was a necessary difficulty, like the lancing of a boil, to bring about the genuine spiritual health of the wayward confessor. Giving further insight into his motivation of compassion in confrontative ministry, Spurgeon persuaded his readers to perceive the personal danger in failure to act: “to leave others in their sins unreprieved is to be ‘partakers of other men’s sins.’” Furthermore, he invited his readers to see the love in the act of reproof by remarking upon the “duty of warning our neighbors for their good.”⁵⁶ Perhaps more succinctly: “You cannot do your friend a greater kindness than to admonish him in the Lord, nor can you wish your enemy a greater injury than to go unrebuked.”⁵⁷

⁵² *S&T* 1866:138.

⁵³ Contra the rebuttal of the magazine, which accused Mr. Tyler of defamation and “[perpetrating] an unfounded libel.” They claimed he knew too little of their aims to write what he did. *S&T* 1866:138.

⁵⁴ *S&T* 1865:38.

⁵⁵ *S&T* 1865:38. The following exhortation in the article brings various passages of Scripture to bear on the theme: many of which were bypassed in his larger preaching ministry. However, they are marshaled here. A list includes: Lev 5:1; Mk 3:4; Lev 19:17; Matt 18:15; Rom 15:14; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 4:18; Hebrews 3:13-10:24; Prov 29:15; Prov 19:25; Ps 141:4; Matt 7:6; Prov 3:14,15; Prov 25:12. This list gives insight into how Spurgeon viewed these passages. In his mind, they pertained to the grace of reproof in general and, when appropriate, church discipline in specific.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

In February 1869, Spurgeon's brother J. A. Spurgeon penned the month's first article, "Discipline of the Church at the Metropolitan Tabernacle."⁵⁸ This represents "the closest thing that exists" to a manual of church order from Spurgeon's universe.⁵⁹ In it, James Spurgeon explained that the purpose for the article (which he called a "paper") involved "the discipline of our churches" and more specifically "the discipline of the church at the Metropolitan Tabernacle."⁶⁰ Prefacing his description of the common practices of church discipline at the Tabernacle, James Spurgeon was compelled to offer a defense of their philosophy and procedure in light of expected dissent.

Revealing the congregational tinge of the Tabernacle's polity, he replied to possible objections from within, noting that the church denied that their methods in screening new members "keeps away any worth having," and arguing that "it need not be an offence to any, and it will be an immense blessing to that church which watches for souls, and rejoices over one repenting sinner more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance."⁶¹ Seen clearly here, the intention to confront sin through the means of membership processes obtained in the methods of the church; those methods were motivated by genuine concern for souls. Far from representing unilateral action on the part of the elders, the process highlighted the congregation's involvement at numerous points. Instances where excommunication proved necessary were presented to the church, and the elders made known cases wherein their body thought it prudent to withhold certain private details of a particular case of discipline.⁶² The procedure seemed on all fronts to follow the biblical pattern of Matthew 18, to maintain as a goal the conversion and sanctification of the wayward, and to reject any residue of harsh retribution. In a word, the manner in which the Metropolitan Tabernacle approached disciplinary confrontation, undersigned by Spurgeon, seems wholly appropriate, affirming the practice's necessity, encouraging biblical gentleness, and taking no improper joy in the act.

In summary, Spurgeon and his proxies writing for the *S&T* intended to publicize their church practices for the encouragement and edification of like-minded churches. Insofar as their readership was broad, so was their influence. Further, by drawing lines between themselves and other groups with other practices, Spurgeon's writing ministry mounted an attempt to inculcate into the wider evangelical world a propagation of a specific brand of doctrine and church polity. If his ministry at church represented Spurgeon's "internal affairs" division, his writing ministry served the function of "public relations." Spurgeon saw the evergreen danger of error at home and prompted his church to adopt a biblical polity to address those errors. But he also sensed error percolating without, and used publications like the *S&T* as a kind of vanguard of the truth among the culture he felt responsible to persuade.

⁵⁸ *S&T* 1869:49. It is important to point out one awkwardness in representing articles from *S&T* as Spurgeon's own thought. While he was certainly the editor of the magazine, not all articles were penned by him. Further, some articles do not include the name of the author (though it is assumed these would have been penned by Spurgeon himself unless otherwise noted). However, insofar as the editor of a work – and particularly one so concerned to present a particular vision of doctrine and polity – retains final editorial discretion of items published, those things written in *S&T* are taken in the present work as representing views Spurgeon would have been in agreement with. As such, this paper assumes a freedom to speak of the points conveyed in *S&T* as conveying Spurgeon's own views.

⁵⁹ Chang, "Militant Ecclesiology," 115n290. More study into the specific posture of Spurgeon and the Metropolitan Tabernacle's polity would yield salutary gleanings. In the course of the same introduction, James Spurgeon both laments that Baptists and paedobaptist have "gone as far in the direction of diversity as possible, and weakness rather than strength has been the results," and posits a variety of a mere polity biblicism when he asserted that "*we have no written code of laws but the Book of Inspiration.*" *S&T* 1869:49-50.

⁶⁰ *S&T* 1869:39.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 54-55.

Spurgeon and Confrontation in Public Controversy

The written word was indeed Spurgeon's medium of influence during times of public controversy, but the present work is concerned to examine 'how' he so engaged and what gleanings are evident from his confrontative strategy. During Spurgeon's tenure at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, writers have historically spoken of three major controversies in which he was involved: the Hyper-Calvinism Controversy, the Baptismal Regeneration Controversy, and the Down Grade Controversy.⁶³ However, Larry Michael, a scholar of his controversies has identified no less than seven in total.⁶⁴ Due to the limitations of space, the following commentary will glean instructive points from some, but not all of these seven.

The "Rivulet Controversy" dealt with a hymnal of the same name produced by Congregationalist pastor Thomas T. Lynch. Lynch's hymnal was perceived by Spurgeon to have both committed active theological error and to have omitted necessary truth about God. This instance is instructive both for its insights into Spurgeon's posture and for the fact that it represents the "first public testing of Spurgeon's emergence as a protagonist for evangelical Christianity."⁶⁵ While Fullerton minimized the incident, Nettles affirmed that the theological issues were important and worth debating.⁶⁶ Spurgeon's tack in this early response, however, proves helpful as it represents the nexus of three themes: boldness, humor, and the published opinion. Spurgeon found it necessary to broadcast his view with an eye toward influencing the public, but did so both before and after commending praiseworthy traits of Lynch.⁶⁷

Yet the substance of his rebuke was electric, combining wit with conviction. He playfully (though viscerally) remarked that if he "should ever be on amicable terms with the chief of the Ojibewas, I might suggest several verses from Mr. Lynch as a portion of a liturgy to be used on the next occasion when he bows before the Great Spirit of the West Wind."⁶⁸ He also laced his response with a sober appraisal: "There are in it doctrines which no man who knows the plague of his own heart can tolerate for a moment."⁶⁹ Beyond these examples of adept use of the written word, however, lies the ever present evangelistic motivation of Spurgeon. What prompted him to enter the fray on this particular occasion was not internecine gamesmanship; rather, he perceived grave danger in the Rivulet's bereft – and even corrosive – theology. If people were singing falsehood, Spurgeon perceived that they might be led eternally astray by believing that falsehood.⁷⁰ As such, he could not remain silent, holding his influence in abeyance.

Spurgeon's engagement in the Hyper-Calvinism Controversy yields instructive lessons as well. For a long time overlooked, this scene represents Spurgeon's first 'major' entanglement in public doctrinal

⁶³ Biographers like Fullerton, however, point to only two: the Baptismal Regeneration Controversy and the Downgrade Controversy. Fullerton, 248-49.

⁶⁴ See Michael. Michael traced the following controversies in Spurgeon's ministry: The "Media" (Hyper-Calvinism) Controversy, The "Rivulet" Controversy, the "Divine Life in Man" Controversy, The Slavery Question Controversy, The Baptismal Regeneration Controversy, the Controversy with the Baptist Missionary Society, and the Downgrade Controversy.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 133.

⁶⁶ See Nettles, 484; W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: Biography* (London, UK: Williams & Norgate, 1920), 291.

⁶⁷ Michael, 131-33.

⁶⁸ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 478.

⁶⁹ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 477.

⁷⁰ "A minister of Christ's holy Gospel should ever be seeking after the conversion of his fellow-men; and I would be sorry to write so much, and expend so much labour, on a work so little calculated to arouse the careless, guide the wanderer, comfort the desponding, or edify the believer." Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 477.

upheaval.⁷¹ The causes of the controversy are debated. Some posit personality differences between Spurgeon and Surrey Tabernacle pastor James Wells, the primary belligerents of the fracas.⁷² Others suggest genuine doctrinal differences as the crux. The truth is that both were in play.⁷³ At any rate, the battle over the essence of genuine Calvinism was ripe for a debate; Wells and Spurgeon simply provided the arguments and reputations requisite for a public match. Wells was the supposed heir of Gill and Huntington,⁷⁴ while Spurgeon appropriated the mantle of the Puritans and Andrew Fuller.⁷⁵ While Wells feared that a liberally cast invitation of all men to respond to the Gospel would signal a forfeit of authentic Calvinism, Spurgeon agreed with Fuller, who said “Indeed, I believe, no writer of eminence can be named, before the present century, who denied it to be the duty of men in general to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls.”⁷⁶

In the end, Spurgeon prevailed publicly. The outgrowth of his ministry represented a quiet vindication of his defense of the truth as he saw it. Less quiet were some of the converts who came to faith under Spurgeon’s preaching.⁷⁷ The highly publicized “Media Controversy” ironically attracted many to Spurgeon’s preaching. The scorn he had endured publicly seemed to produce equally public fruit among those who had previously reviled the man, many of whom asked at their conversion for Spurgeon’s forgiveness in addition to God’s.⁷⁸ Indeed, as Spurgeon related the events himself in his *Autobiography*, the chapter “Revival at Southwark” immediately follows the one entitled “Early Criticisms and Slanders.” In this way, Spurgeon demonstrated his willingness to suffer as a prophet, enduring a temporal and uniquely public vilification in view of cultivating doctrinal health in those outside his own church.

Finally, the Down Grade Controversy remains helpful in terms of the large record of engagement it left. The travail spanned some two years (1887-1888)⁷⁹ and represented the final instance of public theological sparring of Spurgeon’s life. The Downgrade Controversy became uniquely identified with Spurgeon as he represented the principal protagonist for historic, orthodox evangelicalism. This identification, though, came with a litany of costs: those related to his ministry, personal relationships, public perception, and physical health. The occasion of this particular controversy presents Spurgeon as the exemplar Shepherd-Prophet in his strategy, suffering, and public teaching.

⁷¹ Murray has documented at least three causes for the lack of historical and scholarly treatment of the Hyper-Calvinism Controversy. First, he mentioned a tendency to view the doctrine under the broader heading of “Calvinism,” seeing Hyper-Calvinism as “simply a question of degree.” Second, some of Spurgeon’s most high-profile biographers gave short shrift to the event. Fullerton noted glibly that the scene “makes quaint reading.” Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 290. Lewis Drummond’s mammoth work on Spurgeon barely mentions the period. Last, Murray suggested a historical cause: in the time between Spurgeon’s day and now, “true Calvinism has been in eclipse.” Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 2010), 33-34; Lewis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1992).

⁷² It is noteworthy that Michael, in his assessment of Spurgeon’s controversies, subsumes the Hyper-Calvinism Controversy under the heading “The Media Controversy.” Michael, 107ff. The *Lambeth Gazette* had referred to Spurgeon as “now the Star of Southwark.” Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 322. Wells, who wrote under the pseudonym “Job,” may have been threatened by the newcomer’s rising popularity. Cf. Michael, 115.

⁷³ Murray gives room for both views, but seems to agree that genuine doctrinal differences were in play. *Murray*, 39-43.

⁷⁴ See Murray, 40-41. The author recognizes that the question of whether or to what degree Gill was a Hyper-Calvinist is debated. Readers should not be detained by this point, though, in view of the facts concerning how Wells and Spurgeon perceived themselves and read their forebears.

⁷⁵ Andrew Fuller, “The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation,” in *The Works of Andrew Fuller* (1841; repr., Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007). Referencing this debate in a sermon, Spurgeon claimed “I have all the Puritans with me – the whole of them without a single exception.” *MTP* 7:148.

⁷⁶ Fuller, 194n.

⁷⁷ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 329. “Great numbers of the converts of those early days came as a direct result of the slanders with which I was so mercilessly assailed.”

⁷⁸ Michael, 128.

⁷⁹ It is imperative to note that the dating parameters here are drawn from Michael, who limited the span of the controversy to, roughly, the period between when Spurgeon began writing against the Down Grade error and shortly after he announced his withdrawal in October 1887. Jessen, on the other hand, opted for a parameter between 1887 and 1892, the time of Spurgeon’s death. Truly, for Spurgeon, that is when the controversy ended.

Birthered out of upheaval arising from modernism's influence in Victorian era theology, the Down Grade Controversy refers to Spurgeon's perception of a "downgrade" of biblical belief and teaching. Principally, John Clifford embodied Spurgeon's opposition; it was Clifford's writings, sympathetic to Higher Criticism,⁸⁰ which signaled that all was not well within the Baptist Union, Spurgeon's denomination.⁸¹ Clifford wrote, infamously, "it is not God's way to give us an absolutely inerrant Bible, and he has not done it."⁸² Spurgeon's lingering ambivalence over matters raised in a previous controversy surrounding the Missionary Society met with the recognition of Higher Criticism's eroding effects within Congregationalism. Then, "in 1883, a Unitarian minister spoke at the annual meeting" of the Baptist Union; it was all too much for Spurgeon, who readied for battle. Typical of Spurgeon's strategy, the written word would be his mode of contending for truth.

The first outright foray into the issue came in March 1887 by way of a S&T article entitled, "The Down Grade."⁸³ In this article, Spurgeon cast the present battle against the backdrop of the "Great Ejection" of proto-nonconformists from the Church of England.⁸⁴ The historical precedent most concerning to Spurgeon was the ejected group's slow descent in doctrine that followed their expulsion. He saw that the proper bulwark against countenancing any softening of doctrine was a robust maintenance of Calvinism.⁸⁵ After presenting a pages-long historical review of theological error and its usual pathways of decline, Spurgeon finally pivoted to the present: "These facts furnish a lesson for the present times, when, as in some cases, it is all too plainly apparent men are willing to forego the old for the sake of the new. But commonly it is found in theology that that which is true is not new, and that which is new is not true."⁸⁶

Giving a review of Spurgeon's early interactions, Jessen concluded that "his aim was to use the magazine to engage the people under his influence, demonstrate to them the conflict undertaken, and bid them follow him in truth."⁸⁷ And use his magazine he did. Spurgeon's pronouncements only grew in their starkness as he declared a "new religion has been initiated, which is no more Christianity than chalk is cheese,"⁸⁸ and that "a chasm is opening between the men who believe their Bibles and the men who are prepared for an advance upon Scripture."⁸⁹ The "Prince of Preachers" evidenced his preparedness to raise high the warning signal to all who would listen by couching the issues in clear theological and moral terms. Just as Spurgeon called for decision among his hearers from his pulpit, he called for response among his broader public readership in the matter of this novel and pernicious array of doctrines.

Meanwhile, Spurgeon advocated for the maintenance of orthodoxy among those who had the power to join him. He was not without allies, but the Baptist Union demonstrated a deflating recalcitrance

⁸⁰ Higher Criticism refers to "the entire process of evaluating the Bible with the end in view of ascertaining its 'real nature' through reinterpretation "in line with the presuppositions of evolutionary theological and historical development." Eugene H. Merrill, *An Historical Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 25.

⁸¹ Jeremy Duane Jessen, "Mr. Valiant for Truth: The Polemic of Charles Haddon Spurgeon as Pastor-Theologian during the Downgrade Controversy (1887-1892)" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 117-18.

⁸² John Clifford, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (London, UK: James Clarke & Co., 1899), 49.

⁸³ *S&T* March 1887:122.

⁸⁴ This represents yet another example of Spurgeon's interaction with the Puritans. He distinguished between "Puritan godliness of life, and the old Calvinistic form of doctrine." *S&T* March 1887:10.

⁸⁵ *S&T* March 1887:124.

⁸⁶ *S&T* March 1887:126

⁸⁷ Jessen, 120.

⁸⁸ *S&T* August 1887:397.

⁸⁹ Spurgeon, "Our Reply to Sundry Critics and Enquirers," *S&T* September 1887:465.

when he advocated for the adoption of more stringent doctrinal bases of cooperation. All options exhausted, Spurgeon concluded that the only viable pathway forward was to withdraw from the Baptist Union. And he was resolved to withdraw in the spirit of Christian charity. This moment demonstrates the primary difference between Spurgeon's postures in confronting error inside and outside of his own local church. Inside, he had available to him clear biblical warrant for the enforcement of discipline. Outside, he could wield only his persuasive influence in hopes that he could turn the theological tide. Inside the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Spurgeon had authority. Outside, he had merely the force of personality. The Down Grade Controversy is useful in how it highlights that Spurgeon recognized this distinction of purview, and acted accordingly.

The effect of Spurgeon's engagement in this controversy was acute. For him, the issues were visceral and induced dismay in a man already prone to depression.⁹⁰ Spurgeon himself referred to the Down Grade ordeal as "that which was 'killing him,'" though the array of circumstances that faced him was broad.⁹¹ Michael noted that "the personal relationships Spurgeon cherished over the years suffered most during the Downgrade conflict."⁹² Indeed, while his earlier controversies were waged 'against' men, the Down Grade conflict occasioned the loss of many of his acolytes. By the time of the Down Grade Controversy, in other words, Spurgeon had friends and followers to lose. This relational toll was palpable and demonstrates Spurgeon's willingness to live by his words, "I have done my duty, even if all men forsake me."⁹³ The costs he gladly bore only reinforce the contention that Spurgeon willingly took up the mantle of the prophet, suffering and all.

Summary

Distinct from his role as Shepherd at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Spurgeon served as a type of prophet to his culture during times of theological controversy. He was willing to speak boldly, leveraging his considerable influence through interpersonal correspondence and the printed word. Most often, this willingness to confront perceived error resulted in Spurgeon's enduring personal attack, seen most visibly in the deterioration of his physical health during the Down Grade Controversy. As a kind of prophet, Spurgeon was faithful to share the message of truth he believed should be brought to bear on issues of doctrinal fidelity. Yet he also recognized the limits of his own authority outside of his own congregation. In the end, he laid the responsibility for error at the feet of those who desired to continue in it. For he and the Metropolitan Tabernacle, separation was the appropriate option.

Only when surveying the contrast between his pulpit ministry and practice of church discipline within the Tabernacle and his outward-facing tack in cultural confrontation can one rightly perceive the unity of his evangelical posture. Indeed, as the "Quintessential Evangelical," Spurgeon could neither leave his sheep unshepherded nor his cultural moment unaddressed.⁹⁴ The pulpit was only one vehicle for addressing the larger concern of evangelicals everywhere: the broad call to repentance and faith in Christ. His willingness to address issues at home as a shepherd and issues afield as a prophet only buttress his identity as an evangelical in full.

⁹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: The Full Harvest*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1995), 410.

⁹¹ Michael, 271.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 273.

⁹³ *Autobiography*, vol. 2, 471.

⁹⁴ Phillip Ort, Timothy Gatewood, and Edward Romine, "Spurgeon: The Quintessential Evangelical," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 18, no.1 (Spring 2019): 106-107.

Conclusion

While some may lament that Spurgeon did not do ‘more’ to oppose the tides of theological liberalism in Britain – perhaps by forming a new denominational home into which others could follow him – others believed he actually went too far in reforming the Pastor’s College Conference. The fact remains, however, that Spurgeon did not arrogate to himself notions of leadership that extended beyond wielding his specific authority in his own church and through leveraging his influence without. When he was at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, he was its shepherd. When he wrote for wider consumption, he was a type of prophet. Both of these dispositions demonstrate how he perceived his respective roles at his church and in broader evangelicalism.

The controversies into which he stepped each provide useful insights into his posture and strategy. The *Rivulet* Controversy demonstrated an early acuity of theological vision. He was willing to stand where the Bible stood. The Media Controversy proved that Spurgeon considered the high cost of personal ridicule and slander to be worth the risk in contending for doctrinal health. And finally, the Down Grade Controversy gave evidence not only of his willingness to suffer, but that there existed in his mind a clear line between the keys he understood himself to wield at the Metropolitan Tabernacle versus the influence he could marshal in public. Indeed, the charges of the early critics of “Spurgeonism” which alleged that he desired to leverage his influence into becoming a kind of Baptist pope in Britain evaporated in view of the facts surrounding the Down Grade Controversy.

In summary, many can recognize that the circumstances surrounding Spurgeon’s engagement in controversy remain intriguing. For a profitable reading of the events, however, it proves helpful to determine what controlling principles guided Spurgeon. As argued here, chief among these principles is Spurgeon’s self-conception of his realm of authority. As errors arose and danger manifested itself, he addressed them in a way that might be helpfully imitated even today: sometimes as shepherd and sometimes as prophet. The vantage point into his ecclesiology brokered by examining his confrontative ministry moreover presents Spurgeon as an evangelical in full. In his church, discipline and confrontation represented features of his broader evangelistic efforts at calling sinners – even professing Christian sinners – to repentance. Outside of his church, his zeal in confronting cultural and theological error set on display his activist bent, usually otherwise viewed only through the prism of his personal and church charity efforts. Both as shepherd and as prophet, he sought to advance a thoroughly evangelical conception of the church and the Gospel among his people and within broader society. The differences between his inward-facing and outward-facing approaches reveal the limits of how Spurgeon understood his own authority. The record demonstrates that he was neither a “Baptist pope” nor a pastor of careless ecclesiology.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1

TREATMENT OF TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE OR CONFRONTATIVE—RESTORATIVE MINISTRY IN SPURGEON'S NEW PARK STREET AND METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE PULPIT SERMONS

| Passage | Treated? | Number of Sermons |
|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Matthew 5:23-24 | No | 0 |
| Matthew 7:3-5 | No | 0 |
| Matthew 16:19 | No | 0 |
| Matthew 18:15-19 | No | 0 |
| Luke 17:3-4 | No | 0 |
| Romans 14:14 | No | 0 |
| 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 | No* | 0 |
| Galatians 6:1 | No | 0 |
| Ephesians 4:15-16 | No** | 0 |
| Ephesians 5:11 | Yes | 1 |
| Colossians 3:16 | Yes | 1 |
| 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 | No | 0 |
| Titus 1:13 | No | 0 |
| Titus 3:10-11 | No | 0 |
| Hebrews 3:13 | Yes | 2 |
| James 5:19-20 | Yes | 2 |
| Jude 22-23 | No | 0 |

*Though 1 Cor 5:7 is treated in a sermon, only a sentence from the verse is taken: one referring to Christ the Paschal Lamb. The sermon in no way treats the pertinent material concerning cleansing the leaven of the sexually immoral in the context of the wider passage.

**This sermon technically treats the passage listed, but in Spurgeon's quotation of the text, it excludes the portion of verse 15 that would pertain to confrontation. The sermon, thus, doesn't treat the topic and as such cannot be counted here.

TABLE 2

TREATMENT OF TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE OR CONFRONTATIVE—RESTORATIVE MINISTRY IN SPURGEON’S “LOST SERMONS”*

| <u>Passage</u> | <u>Treated?</u> | <u>Number of Sermons</u> |
|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Matthew 5:23-24 | No | 0 |
| Matthew 7:3-5 | No | 0 |
| Matthew 16:19 | No | 0 |
| Matthew 18:15-19 | No | 0 |
| Luke 17:3-4 | No | 0 |
| Romans 14:14 | No | 0 |
| 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 | No | 0 |
| Galatians 6:1 | No | 0 |
| Ephesians 4:15-16 | No | 0 |
| Ephesians 5:11 | No | 0 |
| Colossians 3:16 | No | 0 |
| 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 | No | 0 |
| Titus 1:13 | No | 0 |
| Titus 3:10-11 | No | 0 |
| Hebrews 3:13 | No | 0 |
| James 5:19-20 | No | 0 |
| Jude 22-23 | No | 0 |

*Data is drawn from Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon*, ed. Christian T. George, Jason G. Duesing, Geoffrey Chang, and Phillip Ort, 7 vols. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016-2022).

TABLE 3

TREATMENT OF PASSAGES IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING AND IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING* TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE OR CONFRONTATIVE—RESTORATIVE MINISTRY IN SPURGEON’S NEW PARK STREET AND METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE PULPIT SERMONS

| <u>Passage</u> | <u>Passage Preceding</u> | <u>Passage Following</u> |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Matthew 5:23-24 | Untreated | Untreated |
| Matthew 7:3-5 | Untreated | Treated |
| Matthew 16:19 | Treated | Untreated |
| Matthew 18:15-19 | Treated | Treated |
| Luke 17:3-4 | Treated | Treated 3x |
| Romans 14:14 | Treated | Untreated |
| 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 | Untreated | Untreated |
| Galatians 6:1 | Untreated | Treated |
| Ephesians 4:15-16 | Untreated | Untreated |
| Ephesians 5:11 | Untreated | Untreated |
| Colossians 3:16 | Treated | Treated |
| 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 | Treated | Treated |
| Titus 1:13 | Untreated | Untreated |
| Titus 3:10-11 | Treated | Untreated |
| Hebrews 3:13 | Treated | Treated |
| James 5:19-20 | Untreated | N/A |
| Jude 22-23 | Treated 2x | Treated 4x |

*A margin of one verse is provided when considering what “immediately precedes” and “immediately follows” the passage in question.

The Mosaic Law and Its Application Today: Formulating a System to Identify, Discern and Apply the Law's General Equity

Austin Rouse

There is perhaps no other biblical subject that confuses and confounds Christians more than that of the Mosaic Law and its applicability today. On one hand, it is believed and understood that “the law has passed away,” as Christians have been “released from it” (Rom. 7:6).¹ On the other hand, however, it is also acknowledged that in some way, the Law is still relevant and good, or at least... some of it is; but which parts? The ten commandments seem good and agreeable, but what about the fourth commandment? In the mind of many Christians, the issue is both settled, and yet, also a little blurry. Most have no issue in preaching that Christ has freed Christians from the law, but few also take issue with preaching that it's a violation of the sixth commandment to murder an unborn child; and somehow, to refuse compensation for pastors is equivocal to muzzling the ox while it treads out the grain (Deut. 25:4; 1 Tim. 5:17).

When pressed on the Law and its relevance, Christians often struggle to frame the issue in their minds. Has the Law passed away? What does that mean? Is some of the Law still in force and some of it not, and if so, which laws? How can Christians decide what laws might still be good, useful, and applicable, and which laws are now “obsolete?” These questions can only be settled through a systematic approach to the Bible and its teachings on this subject. In order to understand the Mosaic Law, that is, the law, which was given to the people of Israel, by God, and through the prophet Moses, Christians must look at what the entirety of Scripture has to say on the issue. Despite the confusion around this topic and the ferocity of its debate, there is a rather simple formulation that is most helpful in answering the question: to what use is the Mosaic Law to Christians today? The answer: while the Mosaic Law found its expression in the unique circumstances of the nation of Israel, the totality of Scripture makes clear that the Law's general equity is still binding and useful for God's people, today.

The Law as Torah

In order to navigate this subject, it will be helpful to first define what the Law is. The word translated as “law” in the relevant Old Testament texts, is the Hebrew word, **תּוֹרָה**, (*tôrâ*), and it is used to describe the specific commands of which the Lord gave to the Israelite people at the conception of their nation and covenant with Him. Unfortunately, this translation is not as precise or exact as one might

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references in this paper are to the English Standard Version, 2011 Text Edition (ESV) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

hope.² In a modern, western conceptualization, “law” refers to a very narrow set of commands which must be obeyed and adhered to. Western laws are very exact and specific, and in order for regulation to exist around any particular set of actions, there must be explicit laws governing such things. To commit an act not explicitly “outlawed,” is to operate safely within the confines of the law. The Hebrew word, תּוֹרָה (tôrâ), on the other hand, might better be translated as “direction,” or “instruction.”³ Directions or instructions certainly contain specific commands, in many instances, but the meaning is also much broader than a law, in that directions or instructions might also have principles of use outside of the specific commands in which they were originally couched.

Thus, when referring to the Mosaic Law, it can be noted that it contains specific commands which were directly relevant to Israel, but at the same time, it is best understood as a collective torah, or instruction to Israel. For their purposes, it becomes legal instruction, not necessarily a legal code.⁴ Jesus himself points to this reality when he states that all of the Law and the prophets could be summarized into two simple commands: love God and love neighbor (Matt. 22:40). Another helpful way to frame the Mosaic Law is that it is a “case law.” That is to say, that the collection of commands contained therein, act as specific examples by which the government and the people of Israel might look for understanding in the variety of civil and personal judgments that they may encounter, which were not explicitly addressed in the Law.

For example, an Israelite judge may have a case brought before him which the Law does not explicitly address. Nevertheless, he may find within the Law another command or ruling, pertaining to a different set of circumstances, yet which are similar enough to ascertain how best to proceed in judging the current issue before him. He consults it for understanding and direction on how he should move going forward. At the same time, he may encounter a case in which someone is guilty of breaking the law along the lines of its exact prescription. In such cases, it is graciously clear how he ought to respond. So, in approaching the Mosaic Law, it must be established that it is not a law code, as Westerners might conceive of it, but is a principled instruction couched within a case law which was relevant to Israel and its context. The next logical question, then, is to what matters did it seek to instruct Israel? It has long been suggested, and admittedly contested as well, that the commands of the Mosaic Law might be loosely categorized into three helpful categories: moral laws, civil laws, and ceremonial laws. This point appears to be an obvious one, insofar as it is not difficult to delineate clear differences between the desired outcome of a given law of one category and a law in another.⁵ Laws prohibiting murder, for example, are instituted for entirely different effects than laws commanding the sacrifice of an animal for the remittance of sin. One law preserves human life and is enforced against Jew and Gentile alike (Lev. 24:21-22), and the other maintains covenantal position before the Lord and is given to the Jew alone.

It is argued by some that such distinctions and delineations do not exist, for some laws appear to have both moral and ceremonial expectations, for example, and that to attempt to place particular laws into distinct categories is to exercise arbitrary interpretation and provide misleading theological

² M.J., Selman, “Law,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 497.

³ Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 388.

⁴ James Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant* (Tyler: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), 72.

⁵ Greg Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and its Critics* (Tyler: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 97.

conclusions.⁶ I propose that such an argument is born out of a desire to combat perceived assertions of proponents of theonomy, rather than actual issues with the proposed categorical system. At the end of the day, the categories exist simply to aid would-be Bible students in the labor of understanding individual Mosaic laws. It is a means of summarizing what a particular law's end goal was, and in some instances, there may indeed be categorical overlap, for the law may intentionally or consequentially address more than one issue, be it moral, civil, or ceremonial in nature.

Nevertheless, observable distinctions between the laws must exist in order for it to operate as a useful instruction or case law. In the example of an Israelite judge who must preside over an issue of stolen livestock, to what law or laws will he turn? Certifiably, he will not consult Leviticus 1-7 and the laws concerning burnt sacrifices. Why? Because they are operationally and categorically different. He recognizes distinctions within the Law.

The Law as Revelation

It is not enough to simply identify what the Mosaic Law is functionally, for it is also important to set out what the Law is principally. If the Law is functionally a collective instruction and case law to the people of Israel, then it must logically follow that its circumstantial and explicit instructions must be built around objective principles of wisdom. From where, though, are these principles derived? They are derived from the one who gave them, God. At Sinai, Moses did not come to write the Law after many days considering the natural order of things. He did not create or stumble upon it. The Law was given and commanded to Moses by God (Exo. 20:1). Being so, the principles from which it was derived must inherently come from God Himself and be a reflection of his own, perfect, and eternal character.⁷ The principles which undergird the circumstantial specifics of God's Law, then, are likewise eternal and immutable, as God is eternal and immutable.

This is a point that many are not willing to refute. It is generally agreed that God's Law is derived from and built off of his own good character. Generally, Christians can universally agree that moral laws, such as "thou shalt not murder", are eternally binding. The point of departure, or at least the point of confusion, however, arises when this logic is sought to be consistently applied across the three aforementioned categories. This is understandable, for numerous passages in the New Testament speak of the abrogation of certain Mosaic Laws, namely, those that we might classify as ceremonial (Gal. 2:16); and, Paul frequently appears to speak of the Law in a way that might easily lead one to dismiss its timelessness outright, but it's important to note that even in such instances, he is usually only a few sentences removed from a general praise and commendation of the Law.⁸ The only way to reconcile these perceived tensions, then, is to understand that such "abrogation's" is in circumstance only, and not in principle.

⁶ Jon Zens, *Baptist Reformation Review* 7 (1978): 32-33, 40. Zens notes that many laws have categorical overlap. Paul Schrotenboer, "The Principled Pluralist Response to Theonomy," *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1989), 56-58. Schrotenboer argues that the threefold categorization of the Mosaic Law actually complicates one's ability to interpret it rightly.

⁷ William McDavid, Ethan Richardson, and David Zahl, *Law & Gospel* (Charlottesville: Mockingbird Ministries, 2015), 18.

⁸ Femi Adeyemi, "Paul's 'Positive' Statements About the Mosaic Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164, (2007): 50.

What is meant by circumstance? Circumstance refers to the contextual details and specifics in which a law is given.⁹ For example, “Do not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” is a very specific command regarding the care of a specific animal while it labors. Nevertheless, this law is built upon an underlying principle that might find a wide range of circumstantial application. This universal underlying principle is what many refer to as its “general equity.” General equity simply meaning, the broader principle at play which might find application in any number of circumstances, as the Westminster divines would have defined it.¹⁰ This is precisely how the Apostle Paul is able to use that very specific, and seemingly unrelated law, to apply to the care and payment of pastors (1 Tim. 5:17).¹¹ His intention, as is the case with the many New Testament texts which set forth the Mosaic Law in a positive light, is not to reintroduce the Law in its original circumstantial form, but its general equity, which finds its origins in God’s own good character.¹²

Similarly, it can be asserted that the ceremonial laws requiring the shed blood of an animal for the remittance of sin are circumstantial in their giving, but the principle, that God requires blood atonement for sin, is eternal. Today, God still requires an atonement of blood for sin, however, this “law” and expectation is fulfilled in new circumstances, faith in Christ’s perfect sacrifice. The circumstances of specific Mosaic laws might have “passed away,” but their general equity has not.¹³

The Mosaic Law, in its circumstantial form, was given to the Nation of Israel once they entered into covenant with God. In this, the Lord revealed His character to them through the practical circumstances of the Law, but it was always His intention for Israel not to just be law keepers, but to have their lives transformed by its teaching, or its divine principles.¹⁴ In this unique relationship, they were certainly responsible for the keeping of the Law, both in its circumstances and its principles, but these circumstances were unique to them. Clearly, not every nation was appointed to serve as priests bringing sacrifices before the Lord as a means to atonement. Only Israel enjoyed this blessing. Nevertheless, it is inescapable that the principle of the Law and its expectations were universal, for they conform first and foremost to God’s character.

The nations were not commanded to play the same role in atonement for sin, as Israel was, but they suffered the weight of judgement for their sin, and without atonement, they were rightly and justly punished. No, the circumstances of the Mosaic Law were not and are not binding on anyone outside of Israel, and that is true to this day, but the general equity of the Law is wise, good, and commendable. This is how Isaiah can speak of the condemnation of the nations who “transgress God’s Law” (Isaiah 24:5), or how it is that the Lord can warn Israel to keep the Law, lest they be found guilty as the Canaanites were guilty (Lev. 18:24-25).¹⁵ Finally, it is the general equity of the Law, which is revealed in creation and knowable throughout. On these grounds, Paul can condemn the whole Gentile world in Romans 1:18-32. Due to sin, however, the general equity of God’s Law is hidden from man, and thus it is in God’s Word

⁹ Greg Bahnsen, *By this Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Powder Springs: American Vision Press, 2008), 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., 138.

¹¹ Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant*, 16.

¹² Paul Peters, “The Abrogation of the Mosaic Law,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 89, (1992): 30.

¹³ Zoe Holloway, “A Conceptual Foundation for Using the Mosaic Law in Christian Ethics Part 2.” *Churchman* 120, (2006): 214.

Anthony Keddie, “Paul’s Freedom and Moses’ Veil: Moral Freedom and the Mosaic Law in 2 Corinthians 3. 1-4.6 in Light of Philo,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 37, (2015): 283.

¹⁴ Jordan, James. “The Mosaic Law and Social Issues.” *cdli:wiki*, <https://theopolisinstitute.com/the-mosaic-law-and-social-issues/>.

¹⁵ Gary North, *Theonomy: An Informed Response* (Tyler: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 77.

and his Word alone that man might come to rightly understand God and his will for their lives in all things. The Mosaic Law, then, and its wisdom concerning moral, civil, and ceremonial ought's, becomes imperative for Christians, today.

Applying the Law

If the Mosaic Law was given to supply the people of God with knowledge and understanding about the character of God, and by consequence, prescribe for them how they ought to seek to live and be, then it is inescapably true that the Law of God must be relevant and good for His people, today. After all, if the Gospel is truly redemptive, even in this temporal life, then Christians should want to know how to best conform their lives to God's will, be that in their familial, societal, or governmental aspects. To accomplish this, however, one cannot simply rely on the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus, but must likewise consult the Mosaic Law, for "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).¹⁶ True, the Christian Church is not ancient Israel, and thus, it cannot be expected that the unique circumstances in which the Mosaic Law was couched will fit or match the Church's own, and so a simple wholesale adoption of the Law in its original form cannot be prescribed. This is exemplified, in Peter's own recommendation about the observance of the Law regarding the Gentiles at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:19-20). Other methods must be employed, however, to examine, investigate, and determine the usefulness of any given specific law.

How then ought Christians approach applying the Law, today? In simplistic terms, Christians will discern, observe, and apply the law by the power of the Holy Spirit, and through the lens of the New Testament teaching. To be of true help, however, a more detailed process of approach is necessary. A simple four question system can be prescribed: First, when considering any Mosaic law, the Christian should ask what this law meant in the Old Covenant. Second, it should be asked how this law was fulfilled in Christ. However, it should be noted that while Christ fulfills all the laws in a principled sense, and by consequence, in a circumstantial sense as well for some, not every law has been circumstantially abrogated.¹⁷ Third, it should be asked how this law is fulfilled in the Church. Finally, it should be asked what relevance this law might have in shaping the wider society outside of the Church.¹⁸ Such an approach preserves the relevance and usefulness of the Law, while not falling into the extremes of legalism and antinomianism.¹⁹

Beyond this simple four question approach, however, some additional guiding principles which would serve as helpmates in the labor of discerning and applying the Mosaic Law can be offered; namely, some helpful generalities that usually apply to the three aforementioned categories of the Law and the individual laws that comprise those categories. First, the explicit "moral" laws are often circumstantially the same in application today, as they were in Israel. A bit of nuance is required in defining what exactly

¹⁶ Herman Bavinck, "General Biblical Principles and the Relevance of Concrete Mosaic Law for the Social Question Today," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 13, (2010): 443.

¹⁷ Douglas Moo, "Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 6, (1984): 29.

¹⁸ James Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 201.

¹⁹ Ibid.

consists of an explicitly “moral” law, because indeed it could be argued that the entire general equity of the Mosaic Law is built on moral principle.²⁰ Essentially, what is meant by explicitly moral laws, then, are those laws which are not set in any circumstantial type of case law, such as, “thou shalt not murder.” In this example, note that there are no specific circumstances, as there is in “do not touch any unclean thing” (Lev. 5:2). In other words, the moral principle of “thou shalt not murder,” is evident in itself. Thus, in the giving of explicitly moral laws, we will find that their application today is often a direct corollary to how they first appear in the Mosaic Law.

Second, in most instances, the categorical “civil” laws will not find direct application in modern society; nevertheless, their general equity should be regarded as the supreme guiding principles in law making and enforcement, today. When speaking of Mosaic “civil laws,” what is in view are those laws which deal with the governance of private and public affairs between groups and individuals, and their related penalties. In other words, laws which might reasonably be found to be related to governmental affairs. It would appear that, within the Mosaic system, such civil laws can be seen as only directly relevant and applicable in their circumstantial form to Israel. This is primarily because of the unique relationship which existed between Israel and God. Of very important note on this point, is the reality of their physical proximity to God’s actual presence. This circumstance alone has a massive effect on how one ought approach these very circumstantially specific laws and the reasons that underlaid their giving.²¹ Due to their unique circumstance, their civil laws necessarily reflected this reality, a reality which has not since been seen.

For example, one major difference between Israel and every other civil nation since that time, was the unique intermarrying of the religious authorities and the civil authorities. For Israel, the priests were necessarily a required function in all civil judgements (Deut. 17:10-12). Today, the Christian Church does not occupy such a position, as the primary role we have adopted has included that of teaching the civil authorities and not ordering them.²² In this matter, alone, then, there is reason for discounting the direct application of many if not most of the civil laws. However, that is not to say that those very laws do not contain a general equity which might find application in a new set of circumstances, however different that may look.²³

Finally, the general equity and requirements of the “ceremonial” laws, as with all the laws, are still binding, but they are obeyed through faith in Christ, who satisfies their requirements. In essence, the ceremonial laws sought the reconciliation of faithful believers to God through the circumstances of animal sacrifice. In this, we find said circumstances to have been abrogated or replaced through a new set of circumstances, faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ as sufficient for reconciliation to God.²⁴ So, while their circumstances are no more, their general equity remains, and they are worthy of study for the appreciation and understanding they bring to the specifics of Christ’s own sacrifice and the workings of salvation.

²⁰ Bahnsen, *By this Standard*, 137.

²¹ Peter Leithart, “The Death Penalty in Mosaic Law.” [cdli:wiki, https://theopolisinstitute.com/the-death-penalty-in-the-mosaic-law/](https://theopolisinstitute.com/the-death-penalty-in-the-mosaic-law/).

²² James Jordan, *The Reconstruction of the Church*, (Tyler: Geneva Ministries, 1985), 8.

²³ Michael Flowers, “On the Non-Enforceability of the Penal Sanctions in the Mosaic Law,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 16, (2022): 90-97.

²⁴ Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant*, 16.

Conclusion

The Mosaic Law has confounded many Christians, and the sometimes controversial and exaggerated debate which has been waged over its understanding has led many to draw arbitrary lines in the sand which need not exist. Some have come to the topic with right reverence for the Law, but in that reverence they have made the mistake of conflating its general equity and circumstantial specifics in a way that leaves the two indistinguishable, and their position without right and needed nuance. On the other extreme of the spectrum, some have been willing to throw out the weight and value of the Law in favor of an overly nuanced and muddled interpretation. And yet others have simply come away exasperated and defeated, relegating the topic of the Mosaic Law to the “eternal dust bin,” the place where theological issues are tossed until they might finally be asked and answered in eternity. This need not be the case, however. The Mosaic Law, being a product of God’s own nature and a revelation of his character, is beautiful, essential, and necessary to understand. Within the Scriptures, Christians have all that they need to rightly approach and understand them as they were, how they are, and how they might effectively be put to use today.

But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void. (Luke 16:17)

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Fighting for the Right to Pacifism: Proposing and Exemplifying Cooperative Pacifism

H. Michael Shultz Jr., DMin

Peace is a Christian virtue (Gal. 5:22-23). Christ Himself commended peacemakers (Matt. 5:9), and Paul commended Christians to live at peace with all people (Rom. 12:18). But does this entirely dictate the Christian position on violence? Pacifists have long claimed that their position is a Christian imperative, but what happens when pacifists themselves fall prey to violent opposition? There is, as a consequence of this regrettably oft rehearsed predicament, debate over the proper practice and definition of pacifism. Some pacifism scholars, such as Robert Holmes, have defined pacifism rather broadly as the doing away with acts of violence.¹ Others, like Larry May, have specified more directly that it is not “violence” itself that is to be done away with, but “the intentional killing of those who are innocent.”² This distinction is important, as even Holmes would admit that if this latter definition is accepted, then someone “might well be a *pacifist* but not a pacifist.”³ Thus, the debate rages on as experts attempt to rightly define pacifistic premises and practices.

The purpose of this treatise is not to end that debate, but to enter it with a new premise represented by generations of pacifistic exemplars. By introducing cooperative pacifism as a new model of pacifistic behavior in times of violence, perhaps Christian men and women can be won to peace in these conflicts without sacrificing on their conscience or safety. This will be done through exploring historical narratives which show that by practicing cooperative pacifism rather than abstention pacifism, Christians can maintain their commitment to abstention from violence while also maintaining the hope that they will be treated as valuable by warring parties.

Allow a brief introduction of terms. Abstention pacifism is a neologism herein coined for the purpose of identifying pacifistic behavior which holds that adherents must completely abstain from all involvement in violent ongoing – specifically wars. The proposed contrast would be cooperative pacifism, which is herein defined as the position that pacifists may cooperate with warring parties insofar as they do not act in violent ways themselves. Advocating for various “types” of pacifism is not a novel idea, as May notes several “varieties of pacifism” including “traditional pacifism” and “contingent pacifism”, and Holmes speaks of “pragmatic pacifism.”⁴ The novelty of this contention is that it summarizes all forms

¹ Robert L. Holmes, *Pacifism: A Philosophy of Nonviolence* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 252.

² Larry May, *Contingent Pacifism: Revisiting Just War Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 23.

³ Holmes, *Pacifism*, 242. Emphasis added.

⁴ May, *Contingent Pacifism*, 23-62.; Holmes, *Pacifism*, 265-266.

of pacifism into two camps: those willing to participate in wartime preparations and provisions, and those who are entirely unwilling to participate in any wartime activities at all. In doing this, a person who previously considered themselves a very strict pacifist (unwilling even to fight another person without weapons) might find themselves defined as a cooperative pacifist, while a person who considered themselves a liberal pacifist (permitting that some wars might not be sinful while never finding room to participate in one personally) might be found to be an abstention pacifist.

The argument to be made is not that abstention pacifism is less Biblical than cooperative pacifism, nor the inverse. The argument being made is that both approaches come from a place of desire towards Biblical adherence, but cooperative pacifism prevails as a superior form of pacifism in regard to maintaining the conscience of the adherents as well as their safety and value. This latter clause is truly the distinguishing mark. Some may label this as pragmatism, but if survival is considered a pragmatic consideration, one will have a hard time arguing for any other type – as all other considerations presuppose the survival of the adherent.

The validity of the argument will be shown through first examining the experience of an abstention pacifist during wartime and comparing his experience to that of cooperative pacifists in his same setting. Then, the scope of the study will expand to other examples in increasingly recent periods, with gradually widening broadness around the world and across genders and cultures. Finally, the paper will conclude with a brief presentation of cases in which cooperative pacifism has won the day – showing its value not only as an intellectual affirmation but as a practice which maintains the conscience and safety of adherents.

David Zeisberger: An Abstention Pacifism Exemplar

David Zeisberger was born in Moravia on 11 April 1721 to Bohemian Brethren parents whose leaders followed Jan Hus.⁵ Moving to America as a young man, Zeisberger (who showed great promise as a linguist) began ministering to the American Indians (hereafter Native Americans).⁶ Over the course of his ministry, he founded several communities of Native American Christians, such as Gnadenhuetten, Lichtenau, Salem, Friedenshuetten, Schon-Brunn, and Friednstadt.⁷ He did all of this as a representative of the Moravian Church which had ordained and commissioned him. The Moravian Church was broadly pacifistic, and their missionaries were expected to be pacifists.⁸ Zeisberger certainly was. His pacifistic convictions were not only personally felt and practiced, but preached to his congregants and newly-made Native American converts. It was quite a large feat to convince Native Americans to give up any weapons they owned for self-defense, and to refuse to “get entangled” in any wars going on around them, but this they did in allegiance to their newfound faith as taught by Zeisberger.⁹

This caused serious problems for Zeisberger and his followers, as the late-18th century American frontier was no place for an unarmed man with no allegiances. Zeisberger benefitted often from the fact that upon his moving to the American colonies he had affirmed allegiance to King George of England,

⁵ Edmund de Schweinitz, *The Life and Times of David Zeisberger* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1870), 13-14.

⁶ William Rice, *David Zeisberger and His Brown Brethren* (Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Publication Concern, 1897), 20.

⁷ Rice, *David Zeisberger*, 20, 29, 35.

⁸ John Weinlick, “The Moravians and the American Revolution,” *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 23:1 (1977), 2.

⁹ Hermann Wellenreuther and Carola Wessel, eds., *The Moravian Mission Diaries of David Zeisberger* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 199.

although he was occasionally imprisoned for refusing to take an oath.¹⁰ His Native American followers, however, had no such defense. When conflicts broke out, as they often did, Zeisberger's settlements came under pressure from the warring parties to provide both men and supplies to either side of the conflict. This occurred during the French and Indian War in 1755, and frequently throughout the course of the American Revolutionary War.¹¹

Thus, Zeisberger and his followers were presented with a problem. Surrounded by warring parties and allegiant to none, they felt as though supporting either side would necessarily make them accountable for violence carried out by their chosen side, even if the only connection was through the supplies they provided. As a result, they entirely refused to declare allegiance or provide any support for either side of the conflicts that surrounded them. The thought is obvious: they hoped to remain neutral. The problem was that their neutrality did not serve to keep them allies of all, but rather served to make them enemies of all. One author specifically notes that "because of [Zeisberger's community's] pacifism and its rejection of the oath, authorities viewed them with suspicion."¹² As a result, a trend was established. Suspicion would lead to distrust on the part of the warring agents; lack of goods and men would lead to desperation; and desperation paired with suspicion would lead to Zeisberger's arrest for questioning, and while imprisoned, his Native American followers would be plundered and massacred. Upon return, Zeisberger would mournfully move on and begin another settlement in like fashion. This process occurred no fewer than three times, most prominently towards the end of his life in a village called Gnadenhutten, now infamously known for the "Gnadenhutten Massacre."¹³ Some of the white congregants, fleeing from this massacre at the hands of the British, were met and massacred at the hands of Native Americans, who claimed to be killing them in revenge for their fellow Native Americans killed in Gnadenhutten.¹⁴ Was this the necessary outcome of pacifism in the era? Could pacifists in this confusing situation have maintained their consciences and safety?

The tragic truth is that the Moravian Church of which Zeisberger was a part had advised their missionaries to practice what is herein referred to as cooperative pacifism, a very different approach than what Zeisberger took. For example, in May 1775, six years prior to the Gnadenhutten Massacre, the Moravian Church sent a letter throughout their field as a response to the battle at Lexington and Concord. They knew their missionaries would be placed in an impossibly difficult position in this war, and therefore, they advised their "members to refrain from bearing arms" and yet to "find other ways of serving their country."¹⁵ This they did with incomparably different results from those experienced by Zeisberger and his congregants. One example is found in that of John Graff, a Moravian Bishop who wrote to a minister named Johannes Etwein, saying,

As to the officers in your country, we would advise that you take all possible means to make friends to them; a pair of boots, a pair of shoes, a dozen pounds of coffee, and the like... will prevent many a fine; to make use of this weakness can be no sin.¹⁶

¹⁰ Rice, *David Zeisberger*, 6-10.

¹¹ Ibid., 25.; Wellenreuther and Wessel, *The Moravian Mission Diaries of David Zeisberger*, 116.

¹² Wellenreuther and Wessel, *The Moravian Diaries of David Zeisberger*, 42-43.

¹³ Wellenreuther and Wessel, *The Moravian Diaries of David Zeisberger*, 163.

¹⁴ Ibid., 194.

¹⁵ John Weinlick, "The Moravians and the American Revolution", 3.

¹⁶ "Three Letters Written at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1778" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 36:3 (1912), 302.

It was clearly the position of these men that to contribute to one warring party (or perhaps both) without offering violent service was “no sin.” Elsewhere in cities such as Emmaus and Allentown, Moravian churches offered their houses to be used as field hospitals, while others provided lumber “for the use of the soldiery.”¹⁷ It must not be mistaken as a coincidence that while Zeisberger’s communities were repeatedly massacred, the communities which contributed to the war effort (albeit without providing soldiers or performing violent acts) were treated as valuable citizens not to be abused. Neither Emmaus nor Allentown was ever attacked by any party during the Revolutionary War, showing that it was not only valued by the side that it cooperated with, but was valued to the degree of being worthy of protection.¹⁸

Similarly, Quakers and Mennonites in the region found that by simply “contributing wagons and teams, cattle, horses, grain, and whatever the army needed” they could “demonstrate loyalty” sufficient enough for the warring parties to exempt them from military service.¹⁹ At one point during the conflict, a group of Mennonites were arrested for failing to swear oaths of allegiance. The judiciary presiding over their case recommended to the legislators in their region that the laws be changed to permit the Mennonites an exemption from swearing oaths of allegiance “because they had always been loyal and inoffensive, paid their taxes, provided wagons and teams and food for the army, and even served in non-military capacities.”²⁰

It is then almost unavoidably clear that had Zeisberger and his followers taken the approach of cooperative pacifism rather than the total abstention approach that they did, their plight would have been entirely different. There is simply no comparison between a group which was continually considered suspect to the degree of repeatedly being massacred, and similar groups acting marginally differently receiving praise and even exemptions from written law because of their occasional support of the war effort. Had Zeisberger and his people contributed in any way, it seems almost inarguable that their lives would have likely been spared.

Rose Lambert: A Cooperative Pacifism Exemplar

Almost entirely inverse to David Zeisberger is Rose Lambert. She was born 8 September 1878 in Pennsylvania, the daughter of a Mennonite-minister.²¹ Humbly educated and given some nursing training, Lambert followed a spiritual calling to minister in Hadjin, Turkey, in 1898. Her arrival followed a massacre two-years prior which had left many Armenian children orphans, and it was ministering to these children which filled her time for the next decade.²² In April of 1909, lingering division and hatred erupted between Armenian Christians and Turkish Muslims, and in the violent outbreaks that followed, Islamic mobs frequently massacred the minority Armenian Christians – the community to whom Lambert ministered.²³ To make circumstances worse, all of the leaders of the village in which they lived (Hadjin)

¹⁷ Weinlick, “The Moravians and the American Revolution”, 5-7.

¹⁸ Preston Barba, *They Came to Emmaus: A History 2* (Emmaus, PA: Emmaus Heritage Committee, 1984), 118-124.

¹⁹ Richard MacMaster, “Mennonites in the American Revolution” in *L’Amerique et le France: Deux revolutions* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1991), 196-198.

²⁰ MacMaster, “Mennonites in the American Revolution”, 199.

²¹ Jasper Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ* (New Carlisle, OH: Bethel Publishing, 1920), 251.

²² *Ibid.*, 193.

²³ Bedross der Matossian, “From Bloodless Revolution to Bloody Counterrevolution: The Adana Massacres of 1909” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 6:2 (Summer 2011), 161.

had recently left for a conference cities away.²⁴ As a result, Lambert – who had no recognizable leadership experience or formal education – was the ranking leader of the village as the director of the orphanage.

At this point, some might argue, “Lambert was not in a position like Zeisberger, as she was a warring party – through no choice of her own – but nonetheless, as a member of an attacked people, she was not given the possibility of neutrality and therefore cannot be properly compared to Zeisberger in terms of response.” This argument might have been valid if Lambert had been treated as an Armenian Christian. However, both sides of the conflict, those to whom she ministered and those who attacked, treated her as a neutral outsider who had no place in this conflict and should excuse herself from it. For example, the Armenian citizens of Hadjin heard that the American Embassy buildings out of town existed for the protection of American citizens in times of conflict, and asked her out of concern for her safety, “if the town actually burns and the massacre begins, will you not leave us?” Lambert responded, “How could one think of deserting them... especially when our presence gave a chance of saving them?”²⁵ Similarly, when sending telegrams under the protection of Islamic Turkish officers, she was offered the opportunity to leave with the promise, “They will do nothing to *you*... They will give you protection until things are more settled again.”²⁶ She returned to the village and simply reflected, “the object of the Turks was to get the Americans out of the town... and we saw that the only chance we missionaries had of helping to save the town was to remain in it.”²⁷

All of this goes to show that had Rose Lambert desired to be seen as a neutral party completely abstaining from any position in the conflict, she could have. She was offered that opportunity by both sides of the conflict, and instead chose to stay and support one side. And yet, as a committed pacifist, how did Lambert support the Armenians? No mistake must be made, the Armenians were not pacifists – they armed themselves and waged war immediately. But Lambert did not support them by taking up arms. Instead, she offered her services in non-violent, albeit cooperative and valuable, ways.

Lambert’s cooperation began when she furnished the Armenians with a “spy glass” (probably a telescope) with which they could spot snipers and enemy soldiers from long distances.²⁸ She would later “shelter hundreds” inside her orphanage, because the Turks were careful not to shell or shoot at buildings with American flags over them so as to not cause a conflict with the United States.²⁹ In her own home, she nursed wounded soldiers.³⁰ But perhaps of most importance, she began allowing the prelate, city mayor, and all members of the city council to send telegrams under her name.³¹ The rationale for this came from the fact that the calls for support coming from Armenians were being censored or destroyed by Turkish telegram operators, but telegrams sent by Americans could not be censored or destroyed without causing an international problem. So, in the course of one week, over 60 telegrams were reported as having come from Lambert alone.³² This act, in and of itself, is somewhat spectacular, as it is an

²⁴ Rose Lambert, *Hadjin and the Armenian Massacres* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1911), 34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 50. Emphasis maintained.

²⁷ Lambert, *Hadjin and the Armenian Massacres*, 75.

²⁸ Lambert, *Hadjin and the Armenian Massacres*, 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁰ C.F. Snyder, *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ of Pennsylvania* (New Carlisle, OH: Bethel Publishing Company, 1909), 30.

³¹ Lambert, *Hadjin and the Armenian Massacres*, 56-57.

³² “Women Tells of Peril: Hadjin Still Helpless” *New York Tribune* 22:810 (29 April 1909). Accessed 22 June 2023 via chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.

example of a very blurry place in ethical behavior. Lambert was allowing individuals to sign her name on their letters in an effort to deceive telegram operators. By letter of the law, this was a lie – and therefore a sin. Add to this the fact that Lambert was offered opportunities to escape the conflict, and you have a situation in which a pacifist is supporting a warring side to the degree of being willing to risk sinning to secure their success.

What was the result of Lambert's efforts? She reports that outside of the city, thousands were "crucified, drowned, axed, and burned."³³ And yet, inside of the city of Hadjin, where she operated, 50,000-60,000 individuals were delivered from the massacre.³⁴ The Patriarch of Constantinople saw to it to write personally to Lambert, thanking her for "endangering your own life, and by so doing comforting thousands..."³⁵ And yet, one might imagine what the result would have been if Lambert had taken the approach of Zeisberger, simply bowing her head as she walked out of the city on one of the countless opportunities she was given, refusing to declare support for either side of the conflict. In fact, one does not have to imagine that situation, as only a few years after Lambert's departure, the Armenians were victims of a genocide. One can scarcely believe, given the fate of those outside the city and the ultimate genocide, that the result for the citizens of Hadjin in 1909 would have been anything short of massacre without Lambert's cooperation as a pacifistic supporter of their cause.

Broader Historical Exemplars of Cooperative Pacifism

Beyond Zeisberger and Lambert, there are countless examples of pacifists practicing cooperative pacifism and experiencing massively different results than their abstention counterparts. Critics may doubt the longevity of the cooperative pacifistic contention as a model. Thus, allow some thought to be expressed towards time frames and continuity. Zeisberger's time in the American frontier stretched from roughly 1740-1808, and Lambert's experience in Turkey occurred in 1909. Therefore, to fill the interim between them, take an example of the Mennonites in Russia during the time of the Crimean War (1853-1856), and to fill the interim between Lambert and the modern day, take the Dukhobors in Canada during the Second World War (1939-1946) to complete the argument. These examples will stretch not only time but geography and culture, as well as giving helpful insights in different approaches given the magnitude of the conflict and the locality of its occurrence.

Looking first at the Mennonites in Russia, they were only recently settled in the Russian frontier when the Crimean War erupted. The Russian Mennonites had been invited to settle the region now known as Ukraine by Catherine the Great only a generation prior. As a Mennonite community, they were close-knit, not learning the Russian language, not accepting the Russian Orthodox Church, not sending their children to Russian schools, and perhaps most importantly, entirely refusing "to bear arms of any kind under any circumstances."³⁶ Because of these clear lines of distinction, they were often referred to as "German" colonists, despite having resided in Russia for nearly 70 years. And yet, despite these obvious

³³ Lambert, *Hadjin and the Armenian Massacres*, 104.

³⁴ The population of Hadjin in this era is difficult to estimate, but Lambert reports that upon her arrival, the city held a steady population of "about 20,000" (24) and Matossian reports that each Spring 30,000-40,000 migrant farmers would make their way to Hadjin for work (156, 160). The events above described occurred in late April, and therefore one would expect these migrants to be present. Hence the estimate given.

³⁵ Lambert, *Hadjin and the Armenian Massacres*, 7.

³⁶ Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite CO's Under the Russian Tsars (1787-1917)" *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 37:3:6 (May 2017), 83.

cultural divisions, when the Crimean War broke out, the Mennonites immediately rushed to support the Russian cause.³⁷ Their immediate response and one-sided support of Russia has been noted as having “certainly created problems” for pacifistic historians, as it was not a fringe group or even a minority of Mennonites who acted this way. Instead, pacifistic historians hesitantly conclude that “during the Crimean War the majority of their co-religionists shared their convictions.”³⁸

Importantly, historians have pointed out that “no one was recruited from Mennonite communities to do any shooting, as far as one can tell from the sources.”³⁹ It is even noted that they never transported weapons, out of a conviction not to have anything to do with them. And yet, “thousands of loads” of other materials, including soldiers, were moved by Mennonites.⁴⁰ They further “agreed to do alternative service, such as medical and forestry work.”⁴¹ For all of this work, they were praised by Russian political figures and popular authors alike.⁴² Similar to the experience of the Mennonites and Quakers in the American Revolution, the support they offered garnered them special legal privilege as well as decades-long recognition for their willingness to support the effort in their own way.

A century later, on the other side of the world, another (lesser known) pacifistic group called the Doukhobors found themselves in Canada at the outset of the Second World War, facing calls to support the war effort. They were adamant that while they could not fire or carry weapons, they would willingly join the army.⁴³ When assigned to duties overseas, they served as medics and nurses, while those remaining in Canada or other non-warring areas worked in “Alternative Service Work Camps” – a type of camp for conscientious objectors.⁴⁴ After the war, they were often sent overseas to work on reconstruction, oftentimes utilizing their skills as farmers and livestock keepers to “relieve the suffering and distress which follows in the wake of war.” These duties earned them the name “seagoing cowboys” as they spent more time tending animals to assist the European people than anything else.⁴⁵

Conclusion

In all of the examples given of cooperative pacifism in action, one may easily see the disastrous results that would have occurred had they taken the approach of Zeisberger and assumed that they might be considered neutral figures entirely unengaged with the conflict. Pacifists will never be considered that way – which is an important factor to consider when deliberating over pacifism altogether. Warring parties will not consider anyone neutral if they are entirely refusing to assist them in any way. The desperation caused by war simply does not permit that sort of thinking. Even Switzerland, the international symbol of neutrality, volunteered to serve the warring nations by interning and repatriating over 67,000 soldiers from

³⁷ Klippenstein, “Mennonite CO’s”, 91.

³⁸ G.K. Epp, “Russian Patriotism Among the Nineteenth-Century Russian Mennonites” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 4 (1986), 128, 133.

³⁹ Klippenstein, “Mennonite CO’s”, 92.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Harry Loewen, “The German-Russian Tensions Among the Mennonites in Russia (1789-1917)” *Perspectives on Mennonite Life and Thought* 2, Abraham Friesen, ed., (Fresno, CA: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1979), 144.

⁴² Ibid., 141.; Klippenstein, “Mennonite CO’s”, 92.

⁴³ Robert Sawatzky, “A Comparison of the Mennonite and Doukhobor Emigrations from Russia to Canada, 1870-1920” *Masters Thesis* (Dalhousie University: Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1998), 132.

⁴⁴ Ken Bechtel, “A Premillennialist Pacifism: The Canadian Swiss Mennonite Peace Position” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 25 (2007), 95.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 96.

all of the warring nations in World War I in order to negotiate their position of neutrality.⁴⁶ It is a reality with which to reckon that neutrality in war is purchased by participation in other aspects of war than violence. Therefore, having explored the tragedy that is the story of David Zeisberger and his abstention pacifism method, and having compared it with the cooperative pacifism practiced by other Moravians like him in the era in which he lived, Rose Lambert, the Russian Mennonites, and the Canadian Dukhobors, one must conclude that cooperative pacifism as a theory and practice is superior to abstention pacifism in terms of maintaining the consciences and delivering the safety of those practicing it.

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⁴⁶ H. Michael Shultz Jr., “Watchtower Under Siege: The Swiss Experience of World War I” *History Matters* 16 (2019), 50.

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Standing Against the Scourge of Tyranny: The Role of Public Authority in Deposing Tyrants in *De Regno* and *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*

Lucas E. Vieira

“... Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'” (Acts 5:29)

When, and how, can a community under the unjust rule of a tyrant rise up against their ruler? This question — whether during the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformation, or the year 2020 — has proven to be undoubtedly relevant. The renowned theologian-philosopher Thomas Aquinas provides a response to this question in his lesser-known treatise titled *De Regno*, or, *On Kingship*.¹ An insightful analysis on the role of kings and the nature of tyrants, *De Regno* argues that tyrants in certain circumstances may be deposed, but not by private individuals. Writing 300 years later in 1579, the Huguenot author of *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* argued along the same lines, that, while tyrants must be deposed, they must not be defied solely by private citizens.² By reading Aquinas' *De Regno* alongside the protestant treatise, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, I shall posit that, while Aquinas' argument aptly designates the public authority as means for the community's defense against tyranny, it falls short of adequately articulating how that public authority is to actually operate in defiance of a tyrant. Where Aquinas stops short, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* seems to provide a viable option, namely with its articulation of the role of the lesser magistrate. Before analyzing the arguments of resistance, it is necessary to first turn to Aquinas' understanding of the role of the king.

Aquinas on Kingship & Tyranny

In the preface of *De Regno*, Aquinas alerts his reader that his treatise was written specifically to kings.³ He goes on to acknowledge God, the one who is “King of Kings” and “by whom kings reign.”⁴ Indeed, upon introducing his work, Aquinas makes clear that the true source of a king's authority is God, and thus the standard to which those kings are held is set by God. Aquinas points out that Ezekiel 34:2 states that “Shepherds must seek the good of their flock.”⁵ Aquinas applies this verse specifically to the role of kings among the community. Man needs something, or someone, to guide him toward his God-designed end.⁶ Basing his argument off of nature, the theologian argues that a community of men requires *rule* in order to bring about the common good.⁷

¹ Some manuscripts title the treatise *De Regimine Principum*. Dyson chose to utilize that title in his collection of Aquinas' political writings. Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xix.

² While the actual name of the Huguenot author goes unknown in history, the treatise was written under the pseudonym of “Stephen Junius Brutus.”

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6. Considering the single man's inability to live sufficiently without the community, Aquinas argues, “One man, however, is not able to equip himself with all these things, for one man, cannot live a self-sufficient life.”

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

The question thus arises — how can one attain the common good of the community? In chapter three, Aquinas posits, “The good and well-being of a community united in fellowship lies in the preservation of its unity.”⁸ Herein lies Aquinas’ apology for kingship; unity of rule will more likely bring about unity within the community. One individual, namely, a king, can achieve unity more effectively than a community with a plurality of rulers — whether that community be governed by an aristocracy, republic, or democracy.⁹ Nature demonstrates the preference for unity of rule, as Aquinas considers that the body, the soul, the bees, and even the universe have a singular ruler instead of multiple.¹⁰ Therefore, a community is most unified when there is one ruler. This ruler, as Aquinas argues, must seek the common good of the people, as opposed to their own good.¹¹ The tyrant, then, seeks the good of only one.¹² This form of rule, according to *De Regno*, is the worst out of all possible types of rule. Tyrants are driven by their passions, and they seek to suppress the good of the people in favor of their own good.¹³ Aquinas posits, “Tyrants therefore endeavor to prevent their subjects from becoming virtuous and increasing in nobility of spirit, lest they refuse to bear their unjust dominion.”¹⁴ With no desire for the common good, tyrants destroy their communities, prevent the growth of virtue, and defy God’s role for kings – to help guide communities to their proper end.

Kingship & Tyranny in *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*

While *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (*Vindiciae*) is written to protestant citizens seeking to defend themselves against the deeds of tyrants, the treatise still provides the reader with an understanding of the role of kings. The author of the treatise, under the pseudonym Junius Brutus, makes a clearer connection of the law of God to the role of kings. Similar to Aquinas, Brutus states that “It is only by God that kings reign.”¹⁵ Bringing Scripture to bear, the author argues that kings are delegates, having a “derived” authority.¹⁶ Kings operate as vassals of God; truly, the Bible calls them his “ministers.”¹⁷ Kings are to be the stewards and tenants, while God is the owner and master.¹⁸

With that understanding of the derived authority of kings, the author makes clear the bounds of the king’s authority in the first question of *Vindiciae*, arguing that kings must be obeyed by Christians with one exception, “that they command not that which is repugnant to the law of God.”¹⁹ Kings have limits on their authority, and that authority is primarily limited by God. It is within this reality of kingship that Brutus makes his case for defying tyrants: Christian citizens may defy those kings who fail to live up to God’s established standards for kings.

Throughout the first question of the treatise, Brutus analyzes a variety of the biblical kings and demonstrates that God had established a covenant with both the king and the people. The king had the duty to preserve and promote God’s law, and if he failed to do so, his kingship was delegitimized. Brutus extends this covenant between God and kings beyond the people of Israel to any Christian kingdom.²⁰ Thus, any and all kings owe a duty to rule according to God’s law and not contrary to it.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 10.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹¹ Bleakley provides an insightful explanation on this point, “The ruler’s laws give shape and form to the city — thus, as the formal of the city, the ruler, as lawgiver, creates unity. Aquinas declares that the unity of the community is peace, and that this ‘must be brought into being by the skill of the ruler.’” Holly Hamilton Bleakley, “THE ART OF RULING IN AQUINAS’ ‘DE REGIMINE PRINCIPUM.’” *History of Political Thought* 20, no. 4 (1999): 575–602.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 12.

¹³ Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵ Junius Brutus, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos: A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2020), 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 7. Brutus states, “The earth yields no increase without the dew of heaven” to demonstrate how all earthly things — including kings — are dependent on God.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁰ Ibid., 14-16.

What, then, is the role of a king who rules according to the law of God? Brutus outlines the role of the good king as follows: “Therefore, all kings are vassals of the King of Kings, invested into their office by the sword, which is the cognizance of their royal authority, to the end that with the sword they maintain the law of God, defend the good, and punish the evil.”²¹ The King, then, is able to use coercion to accomplish his God-ordained tasks. With this understanding of the role of the king, Brutus turns to discuss what must be done when the King violates God’s law and commands that which is contrary to it. This sort of action by a king, according to Brutus, amounts to tyranny.

Resistance to Tyranny According to *De Regno*

Tyranny, being the worst form of rule in Aquinas’ mindset, must be avoided by the people. He states saliently, “It is therefore necessary to labour with diligent care to provide the community with a king who is of such a kind that it will not fall victim to a tyrant.”²² Indeed, the first step of resistance against a potential tyrant — ensuring that those who enter the role of the king will not become tyrants — is *preventative*. Aquinas seems to be arguing from reason, as he makes clear that the preferred method of avoiding a tyrant is assessing that individual prior to their taking office. Quoting 1 Samuel 13:14, Aquinas calls to mind the character of King David prior to his appointment as King of Israel.²³ Thus, assessing the character of a king becomes a central aspect of avoiding tyranny within the community. What logically is implied by this discussion is that the community should have the ability to confirm or deny a king from entering office. If a community should “labour with diligence” to select a king that is worthy of the office, then that community must have some form of authority over the king, at least at some point in the appointment process.

Not only does Aquinas suggest that the community should prevent tyranny by assessing and elevating the character of a potential king, he also posits that there should be procedures put in place that allow the community the means to remove a king if he declines into tyranny. Essentially, Aquinas calls for a limitation of the king’s power, prior to the installation of that king. He states, “...the government of the kingdom should be so arranged as to remove from the king the opportunity of becoming a tyrant; and, at the same time, his power should be restricted so that he will not easily be able to fall into tyranny.”²⁴ This is an insightful aspect of Aquinas’ argument for resistance against tyranny. The government should be set up in such a way that it is lawful, even necessary, for the community to remove a tyrant.²⁵ Aquinas’ argument here provides the foundation to demonstrate that resistance to tyranny is not only allowed but encouraged, if and only if it is legal to do so. The following question arises: How exactly might a community establish these limitations and utilize them in order to remove a king who has declined to tyranny? Unfortunately, while Aquinas states that he will discuss these things in “subsequent chapters”, he fails to do so in his treatise.²⁶ This is a major omission of Aquinas’ treatise.²⁷ As shall be demonstrated later, it is within these omissions that *Vindiciae* may provide viable solutions.

Having established Aquinas’ thought in terms of preventing tyranny, one must now turn to analyze Aquinas’ argument as to what to do if a king does become a tyrant. Aquinas implies two categories of tyranny — a tolerable tyranny and an excessive tyranny. How should a community act when tyranny is tolerable? Aquinas posits, “It is more advantageous to tolerate a degree of tyranny for the time being than to take action against the tyrant and so

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²² Aquinas, *Political Writings*, p. 17.

²³ *Ibid.*, 18. Aquinas calls to remembrance how “God sought a man after his own heart.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ In regards to this, Blythe saliently notes: “But Thomas makes the stronger statement that the government of the kingdom should be so arranged that the opportunity to tyrannize is removed and that the king’s power should be so tempered that he cannot easily become a tyrant. What can he have meant? The word ‘tempering’ is especially provocative. Certainly something beyond power of deposition or the moral strength of custom is meant. It suggests that the king’s power be limited or controlled by other governmental institutions, so that it cannot exceed what is proper.” James M. Blythe, “The Mixed Constitution and the Distinction between Regal and Political Power in the Work of Thomas Aquinas.” (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 47, no. 4, 1986), 556.

²⁶ Aquinas, *Political Writings*, p. 18.

²⁷ Breidenbach and McCormick also point out Aquinas’ limited thoughts in regards to this point when they state, “Aquinas spends *only* two paragraphs on how, through the careful selection of a king and the limitations to his power, tyranny can be prevented in a monarchy. He mostly offers provision for when monarchy lapses into tyranny.” (emphasis added) Michael D. Breidenbach and William McCormick, “Aquinas on Tyranny, Resistance, and the End of Politics,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 44, no. 1 (2014): pp. 10-17, p. 11

incur many perils more grievous than the tyranny itself.”²⁸ Here, Aquinas makes clear that it may be the case that defying a tyrant may do more to harm the common good of the community than simply tolerating a tyrant.²⁹ He argues from experience, demonstrating that often when the populace seeks to overthrow a tyrant, dissensions arise among the community that threaten the unity and common good of that community.³⁰ Furthermore, Aquinas references Syracuse and Dionysius, showing that it is possible that overthrowing one tyrant could lead to the installation of a more oppressive tyrant.³¹

Aquinas admits, though, that there are times when tyranny is so excessive that it is virtuous to take steps of defiance against it. He states that some claim that it is consistent for “mightier men” to kill a tyrant “in order to liberate the community.”³² One example of this — suggested by Aquinas — is the Israelite Judge, Ehud, who slayed the king of Moab. Does this example, according to Aquinas, vindicate the use of force against a tyrant? In the case of private persons, Aquinas provides a resounding “No.” He states noticeably, “It would be a perilous thing, both for a community and its rulers, if anyone could attempt to slay even tyrannical rulers simply on his own private presumption.”³³ In sum, private persons should not take matters into their own hands. This, Aquinas posits, would set a terrible rule of thumb for deposing kings. Indeed, if a private person was justified in slaying a tyrant, it might provide some sort of foundation for a private person to slay a good king. This reality would be a “peril to the community”, and it is for this reason that Aquinas rejects the private person’s ability to forcefully depose a tyrant.³⁴

How, then, does Aquinas offer recourse in the circumstance that an excessive tyranny is upon the community? He writes, “It seems, then, that steps are to be taken against the scourge of tyranny not by the private presumption of any persons, but through public authority.”³⁵ Aquinas posits two possible means of recourse with this “public authority” in mind. First, the theologian-philosopher claims that a community which provides itself with a ruler (perhaps in the way mentioned above in the steps of prevention) can “depose or restrain a king whom it has appointed.”³⁶ Aquinas offers Roman examples of the ejection of a tyrant by the senate. Beyond this, Aquinas does not provide any sort of explanation as to how the tyrant is to be deposed by this community. Who is allowed to slay or remove the tyrant?³⁷ The community is able to in this circumstance, but not private persons in the community.

The second possible means of recourse is to appeal to the superior of a king, if indeed that king possesses a superior.³⁸ Aquinas provides limited explanation in regards to this point, but demonstrates that the Jews appealed to Caesar because of the tyrannical reign of Archelaus, and Aquinas implies that this appeal was justified.

Beyond these two possible means, Aquinas offers the readers of *De Regno* with no other means of human aid, only divine. He states, “If, however, there can be no human aid at all against a tyrant, recourse must be had to God,

²⁸ Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 18.

²⁹ Swartz comments on the preeminence of the idea of the common good in Aquinas’ argument when he states, “Justifiable resistance is a public act of a whole people, and the misuse of the right is safeguarded by the moral condition that those who act as the agents of the people are responsible for seeing that their action is less injurious to the general good than the abuse which they are trying to remove.” These public agents, whomever they may be, have the duty to consider the common good above all in order to be justified. N.P. Swartz, “Thomas Aquinas: On Law, Tyranny And Resistance,” *Acta Theologica* 30, no. 1 (2010): pp. 145-157.

³⁰ Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 18.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 19.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 19-20.

³⁶ Ibid., 20.

³⁷ In his earlier *Commentary on Peter Lombard's Sentences*, Aquinas provides a sharper statement in regards to defying tyrants. If a ruler commands one to sin and go against their conscience, that individual is not only “not bound to obey the ruler” but also “bound not to obey him.” This line of thinking aligns well with the arguments from *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*. Interestingly, Aquinas states that this duty to not obey falls on Christians, and it is implied that that entails Christians *generally*. Furthermore, in this earlier writing Aquinas does seem to allow for tyrannicide done by a private person when he says that if a tyrant seized dominion by violence, or the people had no recourse to a superior, then “he who delivers his country by slaying a tyrant is to be praised and rewarded.” Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 74-75. It is unclear why Aquinas changed his stance, but it is clear that Aquinas intentionally avoided this type of language in *De Regno*.

³⁸ Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 20.

the king of all, who is a ‘refuge in time of trouble.’”³⁹ God can turn the hearts of kings, and he can remove tyrants by his will. Aquinas provides a Biblical overview of this reality, and declares that God can set his people free. Without discussing the *means* through which God does so, Aquinas provides a *prerequisite* for this divine help, namely the repentance of the people.⁴⁰ God can give a wicked people a wicked king, and if the people long for the scourge of tyranny to cease, they must be free of guilt. Therefore, a community can achieve divine aid only through repentance.

An Analysis of Aquinas’ Theory of Resistance in *De Regno*

While Aquinas provides helpful insights in regards to deposing tyrants, the argument of *De Regno* causes the reader to ponder a few essential questions for which Aquinas provides no answers. First, as mentioned earlier, how should a community actually go about setting up procedures which limit the power of the king and maintain some form of public authority? Second, when it comes to the use of public authority, who exactly are the ones who have legitimacy to depose or slay a tyrant, since private persons are unable to depose a tyrant? Lastly, if a people is generally good (as opposed to wicked), is there a different way divine deliverance might come?

Having provided an exposition of chapter seven of Aquinas’ *De Regno*, it is evident that the theologian offers no adequate answers to these questions — though he does helpfully cause the reader to consider them. In contrast, one will find that the argument regarding the role of the lesser magistrate presented in the second question of *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* helps to provide answers where Aquinas leaves questions.

The Role of the Lesser Magistrate in *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*

In question two of his treatise, Junius Brutus addresses the inquiry of whether private men may resist by arms. While Brutus previously argued that tyrants are in defiance of God and “justly incur the penalty of high treason against the Divine Majesty” and are thus deserving of being deposed, in this question he clarifies who has the ability to lawfully depose a tyrant.⁴¹ Similar to Aquinas, Brutus states, “Now private persons, they have no power; they have no public command, nor any calls to unsheathe the sword of authority, and therefore God has not put the sword into the hands of private men, so does he not require in any sort that they should strike with it.”⁴² He argues that private persons do not have public authority, and thus it is unlawful for them to depose tyrants. Saliently, the author argues that there is a specific group of individuals who are able to lawfully “sheathe the sword of authority” against a tyrant, namely, the lesser magistrates.⁴³

Arguing that Romans 13 speaks of these lesser magistrates, the author posits that not only can these magistrates take up the sword against a tyrant, but that they are necessarily bound to do so, as it is their duty to protect and safeguard the consciences of the community.⁴⁴ These magistrates are not private persons, but they are individuals who have been granted public command which is recognized by the people. While Aquinas only provides a cursory comment in regards to the senate of Rome deposing a tyrant, Brutus here argues that magistrates — those under the king with public command — are lawfully obligated to defy a tyrant on behalf of the people.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the treatise does not discuss what might happen if the deposing of a tyrant fails or if dissension arises among the people; both of which Aquinas utilized to discourage deposing a tyrant. This is because Brutus understands the government to be established in such a way that the role of magistrates will protect against disunity; unified magistrates against a wicked tyrant will unify the people. But what if the tyranny becomes more excessive as a result of the defiance? *Vindiciae* argues that it is the magistrate’s *duty* to depose a wicked king, and thus the question regarding the aftermath is not pertinent to the discussion. This difference between the protestant treatise

³⁹ Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 20

⁴⁰ Ibid. Aquinas states, “But if men are to deserve such benefit from God they must cease from sin, because it is as a punishment for their sin that ungodly men are given power over them.”

⁴¹ Brutus, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, 52.

⁴² Ibid., 53.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

and *De Regno* can likely be explained by the differing contexts, but another likely explanation is the reality that *Vindiciae* relies heavily on Scripture, while *De Regno* takes nature and experience heavily into account. While *De Regno* is focused on the common good of the people, *Vindiciae* is more concerned with the obedience of the people to God.

Finally, Brutus finishes this section of *Vindiciae* with a discussion of the role of divine aid in resistance. He argues that God can still, like in the Scriptures, bring about deliverance of his people. The author states, “I will say, not withstanding, that the same God who to punish our offenses has sent us in these our days both Pharaohs and Ahabs, may not sometimes raise up extraordinary deliverances to His people: certainly His justice and His mercy may continue to all ages, firm and immutable.”⁴⁶ Brutus recognizes the sin of the people, but points to the justice and mercy of God as the means for deliverance.

Conclusion

Thomas Aquinas’ short treatise on kingship is a lesser-known work full of valuable insights as to the nature of a good king and to what constitutes a tyrant. While valuable for providing a general treatise on kingship, it is herein argued that Aquinas has left several questions open in regards to deposing tyrants. The argument of *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* for the role of the lesser magistrate helpfully provides some form of articulation of much of what Aquinas seemed to be arguing. The authority of kings is limited by lesser magistrates who act in the interest of the people, the lesser magistrates are able to offer a unified legitimate force against a tyrant, and God can work justice and mercy on behalf of His people. *De Regno* poses many of the appropriate questions for those living in the 21st century under unjust government, and *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* gives one set of possible answers.

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⁴⁶ Ibid., 56.

Book Reviews

Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Five Points of Amillennialism*. Conway: Free Grace Press, 2020. 136 pp. Paperback. \$8.95.

The study of eschatology can be overwhelming and intimidating for many Christians. Due to the proliferation of popular-level dispensationalism, they mistakenly believe that it involves complicated charts and the analysis of the latest headlines. Other Christians mistakenly believe that they could not even begin to study eschatology unless they have a seminary-level knowledge of the Scriptures. While some eschatological systems are harder to understand than others, Jeffrey D. Johnson argues that amillennialism is not hard to understand. “don’t need a chart to direct you through a complicated maze of proof texts. To understand amillennialism, all you need to know are five simple points” (11).

Johnson is a pastor at Grace Bible Church in Conway, Arkansas. He was one of the founders of Grace Bible Theological Seminary, where he serves as the dean of academics and as a professor. Johnson is also a prolific author of numerous books such as *Saving Natural Theology from Thomas Aquinas*,¹ *The Fatal Flaw: The Fatal Flaw of the Theology Behind Infant Infant Baptism*,² and *What Every Christian Needs to Know about Social Justice*.³

Summary

According to Johnson, “the objective of this book is not to be a comprehensive resource on eschatology but simply an introduction to amillennialism” (12). Johnson primarily focuses on making a positive case. As a result, he spends little to no time contrasting it with other views. Due to differing opinions within amillennialism, many of the heavily debated eschatological topics such as the timing and identity of the Antichrist are avoided and controversial passages such as Daniel 9, Matthew 24, and Romans 11 are not discussed (11-12). Despite its short length, it is full of exegesis and detailed theological explanations organized by what Johnson refers to as the five points of amillennialism. All five points show that “amillennialism is “simply the gospel applied to the history of the world” (130).

The first point of Amillennialism is the redemptive-historic hermeneutic. Amillennialism is not the by-product of speculative theology or drawn from the latest crisis in the Middle East. It is derived from a detailed and thoughtful exegesis that does not isolate texts, but instead sees it as one rolling meta-narrative. Johnson shows that the redemptive-historic method is not divorced from the grammatical-historic method. It enhances it. Other important concepts such as the divine authorship of Scripture, the Analogy of Faith, and the important role that Covenant Theology plays in interpreting the Bible are discussed.

The second point of Amillennialism is that believers are the children of Abraham. One of the most debated topics in eschatology is the identity of the promised children of Abraham. According to Johnson, “the answer is not found in a New Testament reinterpretation or spiritualization of the Abrahamic Covenant but in the original wording of the Abrahamic covenant” (46). In this short chapter, a strong

¹ Jeffrey D. Johnson, *Saving Natural Theology from Thomas Aquinas* (Conway: Free Grace Press, 2021)

² Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Fatal Flaw: The Fatal Flaw of the Theology Behind Infant Infant Baptism* (Conway: Free Grace Press, 2010)

³ Jeffrey D. Johnson, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about Social Justice* (Conway: Free Grace Press, 2021)

exegetical case is made to prove that Jesus is promised seed of Abraham and that he is sole heir of Abraham's spiritual possessions (47). Any accusation of replacement theology is strongly refuted.

The third point of amillennialism is that the church is the Davidic Kingdom. This chapter explores one of the distinctives of amillennialism that separates it from all other eschatological systems including postmillennialism. According to Johnson, "amillennialists view the kingdom of God as consisting of only born-again believers without any earthly politicians, military soldiers, or weaponry" (57). In other words, the kingdom of God is not a geopolitical-reign of Christ. To make his case, Johnson reviews the promises of the kingdom made in the various covenants and how it was truly established in the New Covenant.

The fourth point of amillennialism is that the new earth is the promised land. This point receives the most intensive treatment than the other four points and encompasses 32 pages – which is a significant portion of a book that is only 130 pages long. Johnson rightly notes that "if new creation is the promised land, the promises of the Abrahamic covenant have only been partially fulfilled" (76). In other words, the kingdom of God has already been inaugurated but not yet consummated (77). To clarify this complicated, but essential theological concept, Johnson makes four convincing arguments. The first argument is that the kingdom of God is fulfilled in two stages, spiritual and physical. The second argument is that there are two comings of Christ. According to Johnson, "At His first coming, Christ suffered and brought good news to the world. At His second coming, Christ will bring woe and judgment to the world" (84). The third argument is that the coming of the kingdom of God takes place in two different ages, the present evil age and the age to come, which will be a time of peace and righteousness on the new earth. The fourth argument is that believers are citizens of two different kingdoms or jurisdictions. As a result, believers "are citizens of the kingdom of Heaven and earthly citizens of the kingdoms and nations of this world" (93).

The fifth and final point of amillennialism is the finality of the second coming. Johnson argues that the second coming is one single event instead of two stages separated by a thousand years. To make his case, Johnson exegetes various passages of Scripture to prove that four things happen simultaneously; the general resurrection, the destruction of the world, the final judgment, and the ushering in of the eternal state. A sizable portion of this chapter is spent on exegeting Revelation 20:1-3 and explaining why the millennium is not a literal thousand years as well as addressing the binding of Satan.

Critical Analysis

As a card-carrying amillennialist who is still stuck in the cage stage, it is difficult to be critical of *The Five Points of Amillennialism*. Many of the criticisms a person may have would be answered if one remembers that the book is meant to be a brief but detailed introduction to the core tenets of amillennialism. It is not meant to answer all the questions a person may have or even address the various disagreements among theologians who hold to it.

The word amillennial literally means no millennial, or that there is no millennium. This term is not accurate since amillennialists do believe in a millennium. They believe that the millennium in Revelation 20 "refers to the spiritual reign of Christ that extends between the first and second coming of Christ, not to a future thousand-year period that takes place after the second coming of Christ" (116). This belief leads to an important question that is often a stumbling block to adopting amillennialism. Does a figurative reading of the thousand-year millennium necessitate a figurative reading of the days of creation? The answer is no. It is the context of Genesis 1 that necessitates that the days of creation were literal twenty-four days just like it is the context and symbolism of Revelation 20 that necessitates a figurative reading.

As mentioned earlier, Johnson focused primarily on making a positive case for amillennialism and spent little to no time contrasting it to the other eschatological views. This approach enabled Johnson to provide the reader with a concise and clear explanation of the core tenets of amillennialism. However, there were times when his arguments would have benefited from briefly interacting with other views and knocking down the strawman accusations. One example of this would be the accusation that amillennialists use a hyper-spiritual hermeneutic that ignores the literal meaning of the text. This is especially true in the area of Old Testament prophecy. Johnson could have helped the reader gain a better understanding of the redemptive-historical hermeneutic by explaining that “it is amillennialists, not dispensationalists, who interpret prophecy literally in that they follow the literal sense of how the writers of the New Testament interpret Old Testament prophecy.”⁴

One of the most common accusations leveled against amillennialism by postmillennialists is that they are too pessimistic about the earth’s future. As a result, they stick their head in the sand and do not fight for Christian values or engage the culture. Johnson addresses this baseless claim head-on by explaining that the amillennialist’s loyalty is to God over all things.

This greater loyalty to God, even when it leads us to civil disobedience, is a benefit to society. Just because the ship is sinking, does not mean we are called to abandon ship. Our love for Christ and the Great Commission compel us to go into the world rather than retreating from society. Our Christian values influence how we vote, and they mandate that we are productive citizens of this world. Among many other things, we stand for the traditional family, and we stand against abortion. Our desire to love our neighbors constrains us to be active members of society and personally help those in need, pray for our rulers, and do what we can to promote justice and peace in this evil age (95).

As Johnson argues, the amillennialist does not accept “loser theology” that checks out from society. Instead, he engages society head-on as an ambassador for Christ in a dark and fallen world. Since amillennialists embrace two-kingdom theology, they are not interested in setting up a theocratic system on earth full of moralistic unbelievers. They focus on the proclamation of the gospel as a catalyst to change lives at the individual level instead of society. The change at the individual level may lead to societal change, but that is not the focus since a moralistic society without Christ leads to spiritual graveyards. According to Johnson:

The gospel changes societies at the individual level. The gospel is not designed for political revolution but for reaching the lost with the hope of eternal life. Unless sinners submit to the gospel of the kingdom, they have no lasting hope. God is not interested in moralizing the wicked. God has not promised to sanctify the culture or to redeem earthly governments, nor is He Johnson rightly concerned with Christianizing the wicked with the false hope of external morality (96).

Another accusation that Johnson tackles is that amillennialists routinely over-spiritualize Old Testament promises and deny the importance of their physical fulfillment. For amillennialists, it is not an either-or situation. You do not have to choose one and deny the other. You can and do have both. Johnson rightly points out that “as a general rule, the promises of the Old Testament have been fulfilled spiritually in the first coming, and they will be fulfilled physically in the second coming” (103).

Since *The Five Points of Amillennialism* is only an introduction to the topic, it would have benefitted from having an appendix of recommendation resources. This is especially true for the first and second

⁴ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 54.

points. The redemptive-historic hermeneutic and the concept that only believers are the true children of Abraham may be new concepts to some readers. Pointing them to more detailed resources would only help increase their understanding and the likelihood of embracing amillennialism as their eschatological system.

Conclusion

In *The Five Points of Amillennialism*, Johnson accomplished his goal of writing a book that is an introduction to amillennialism that also serves as a “bridge to more scholarly books on the subject” (12). While it is only an introduction to the topic, Johnson was able to provide enough information that would challenge a pastor or seminary student who held a different view while making its content understandable to the average Christian. That is something that is needed but is rarely found in other books on eschatology. As a result, *The Five Points of Amillennialism* has quickly become the first book that I would recommend to anyone, especially someone who holds a different view, to read if they want to learn more about Amillennialism.

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Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle Over the End Times Shaped a Nation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. 382 pp. \$29.99.

There is undeniably a renewed interest in eschatology sweeping the American Christian landscape at present. Some might attribute this increased interest to the “Young, Restless, and Reformed” movement, whose participants are now making their way out of seminaries and into pulpits across America, but Daniel Hummel contends that this renewed interest could be the result of a vacuum that has been left in the American evangelical society due to what he identifies as the “fall of dispensationalism.” (5)

Hummel has produced a thoroughly researched and argued text that outlines the “ideas, institutions, and individuals that built dispensationalism.” (xvii) Readers will be greatly benefitted from the historical work that has gone into this, and they will find the book easy to follow. Even as Hummel traces 200 years of Christian history, spanning the Atlantic (although largely based in the United States), he successfully transitions topics, characters, and eras in a way that maintains a sense of continuity even when there is no real connection other than the individuals involved in the events. There is a story-telling skill in historical writing that is often neglected, but Hummel uses it masterfully.

Problems in Titling to Fit the Thesis

That is not to say that the book is flawless. In fact, it stands to be highly-criticized. Perhaps the foremost criticism is the fact that the subtitle of the book does not at all correlate to the thesis of the book. If Hummel intended to show how Dispensationalism “shaped a nation,” he almost entirely failed in that endeavor. He seems to state his thesis as desiring to “make sense of these different trajectories and manifestations of dispensationalism through the study of its history” (xvii) and in this endeavor, he is

astoundingly successful. So, it is very hard to grasp why the subtitle is what it is, and indeed it will undoubtedly confuse many readers. As he traces the history of Dispensationalism, one finds Dispensationalism being influenced by American culture rather than the other way around. From the earliest generation, John Nelson Darby's views are seemingly hijacked and manipulated to fit the American culture. Hummel even notes of Darby, "Americans he met adapted his teachings... for their own ends, in ways he would never have approved of." (49)

There are elements of the book in which the subtitle is supported, such as his explanations of how Dispensationalism created or influenced such famous individuals, events, and institutions as the Niagara Bible Conference (99), Moody Bible Institute (104), Andrew Murray and Hudson Taylor (107), and the Christian and Missionary Alliance (108). And yet, it is not until very late in the book, while discussing the Reagan-era, that clear lines between Dispensationalism and widespread American cultural influence are drawn. (268) What is noticeably missing is any lengthy discussion of the influence Dispensationalists played on the Zionism movement and the American support for the establishment of Israel in 1948, or Israel's maintenance as a closely defended ally today. This subject is only mentioned twice in the book, and those very briefly. (279, 305) He hints that he does not discuss this issue because it has been explored in books such as Boyer's *When Time Shall Be No More*, but that is hardly an excuse for such an exclusion in an historical text of such direct relation to the subject.

Problems with Christian Nuance

Readers accustomed to Christian literature will likely find this book somewhat different from their standard literary diet. Hummel is only newly considering himself a Christian academic – he says as much in his own acknowledgements. (343) This bears itself out, as there are aspects of the book that are more typical of a secular text than a standard Christian publication. For one clear example, he writes, "the Holy Spirit was on the move in the 1850s, but what were its designs?" (26) One might be forgiven for referring to the Holy Spirit as an "it" but there are other glaring issues in the text when it comes to theological nuance that one would expect the author to be more readily able to explore.

Particularly problematic for the book is the fact that Hummel seems to have a very tenuous grasp of the various types of premillennialism. Although he insists on referring to undeveloped Dispensationalism as "new premillennialism" he does a very poor job of explaining what "old premillennialism" was, to the degree that one wonders if he actually knows. He identifies "old premillennialism" with "historic premillennialism" both in the text and in the glossary intended to assist with definitions. (7, 347) Then, he seems to introduce a third category, "chiliasm." Despite referring to these three groups interchangeably, he distinguishes between them ad hoc. His own distinctions vary page-to-page, as he will at one point state that historic premillennialism stretches back to the early church (69), which would seem to synonymize it with chiliasm, only to say elsewhere that historic premillennialism dated to the Reformation. (7) When he does synonymize chiliasts and historic/old premillennialists (70) he does so even when it means synonymizing the views of Isaac Watts, John Gill, Charles Spurgeon, Horatius Bonar (71) and Charles Taze Russell (81) despite these men clearly differing in their eschatology.

In one place, he identifies old/historic premillennialism as regularly practicing date-setting for the return of Christ (51) and exemplifies this by his recognition of the Millerites as being old premillennialists. (58-60) And yet, he later recognizes a distinction between historic premillennialism – as held by men like Philip Mauro and William H. Rutgers – and old premillennialism. He distinguished between the two by noting that old premillennialists affirmed date-setting, while historic premillennialists like Mauro and Rutgers did not. (193) It is then untenably hard to explain why he says that later historic premillennialists like George E. Ladd "traced their influences back to the old premillennial tradition..." even going so far

as to say that historic premillennialism is “a renewed version of old premillennialism going by the name ‘historic premillennialism.’” (258)

To make matters worse, he sometimes missteps and makes claims that are widely-known to be false. For example, at one point he notes that the position that the pope is the antichrist was a “premillennial scheme” despite that view being forwarded in confessions of faith widely endorsed in denominations almost entirely amillennial and postmillennial in their makeup. (242) Another baffling mistake was in his discussion of John Piper (a prominent historic premillennialist), wherein he identifies Piper as a “member of the Presbyterian Church in America” (294) despite his 30+ year tenure as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church.

Poor Grasp of Historical Context

And yet, these mistakes could be overlooked on the basis of the fact that Hummel is not a theologian or a church historian – he is simply a well-trained and qualified historian. Thus, his missteps in terms of Christian nuance and church historical awareness can (and perhaps should) be forgiven. What is hard to overlook is his constant insertion of accusations against historical figures for what historians of his caliber should consider understood in their historical context.

Throughout the book, Hummel levels accusations of either explicit or complicit racism at almost every major figure he discusses. He lashes the entire Moody Movement for racism (119, 124), as well as Dwight L. Moody, Arthur Pierson, and A.C. Dixon individually. (125) He issues one sweeping claim that “fundamentalists” in general were complicitly racist (160), before narrowing in to accuse Bob Jones Sr., J. Frank Norris, and John R. Rice of racism, to the degree of even accusing them of being in alliance with the Ku Klux Klan. (187) There is no citation given to support this affiliation. Still yet, he later accuses Dallas Theological Seminary and its one-time president, John Walvoord, of complicit racism (263), as well as Tim LaHaye (270), Jerry Falwell (279), and John Piper (330).

These accusations are typically leveled on the grounds that these speakers did not speak out against racism in their day. The Moody Movement, he says, “apportioned no place” for Black Americans (119) while others are noted as having rarely given “sustained attention to pervasive social racism.” (125) But this should be no surprise to an historian. A medical doctor studying physicians in the 17th century would not fault them for employing leeches as that was a standard practice of the day. Unfortunately, Hummel seems to have been influenced by such popular revisionist pieces as *Jesus and John Wayne*, which he references. (357)

Even when individuals made asserted efforts to speak on racial issues, Hummel still levels them as insufficient. G. Campbell Morgan wrote of white Christians as being more prone to fall under the leadership of Satan, and even claimed that in the future more than one billion non-white Christians would be led by Jesus to destroy the white followers of the antichrist during the postmillennial slaughter of Gog and Magog. (126-127) And yet, Campbell is still labeled as racist in the book, because he recognized that (in his time) most Christians whom he would have expected to be raptured out would have been white, due to the contemporary success of Christianity in predominantly white nations.

In an almost laughably ironic moment, William Bell Riley is identified as an antisemite despite his comments that he believed that “the Jew not only [had] a great place in past history, but also a major place in prophecy, or history to come.” (216) The irony comes from the fact that in his discussion of Billy Graham only a few pages later, not a single criticism appears. (228) This despite the famous antisemitic remarks made by Graham in the White House in 1972.

In short, to accuse a 19th- or 20th century American of being racist for not speaking out against racism, or in the case of John Walvoord, for “going with the law” (263) is entirely unfair and represents a form of revisionist history that is uncommendable. Simply because someone did not stand up against racism in an era in which racism was the air that was breathed does not mean that they should be called out as racist individually.

Inclusion of Personal Opinion

Hummel also makes a regular practice of including his own opinions in the text, which is somewhat unorthodox given the genre of the book being a history. There are times when his insights can be appreciated, such as when he humanizes John Nelson Darby by describing his personal qualms with public speaking, or when he describes some of the useful interpretive tools fostered by Dispensationalists. (42, 44) Late in the book, he even makes the controversial claim that Dispensationalism is already dead – having met its demise in the 1960s and 1970s. (234) While this assertion will likely be initially shocking to many readers, he does a very good job of defending this thought and presents a compelling case for affirming it as true.

But there are many more occasions in which Hummel inserts opinions that are altogether inappropriate. At one point he refers to Dispensational Theology as “incoherent.” (244) Elsewhere (with no explanation and for no apparent reason) he describes John Piper as a “Bible nerd.” (330) But what was perhaps most shocking to find in an academically-published book was his two-page diatribe against Dispensationalism as being tied to nearly every pariah of the public in the 21st century. He says that Dispensationalists were the “most loyal fan base of support” for Donald Trump in 2015-2016 and “even after his defeat in 2020.” (331) Going on, he ties them to the “Tea Party after the 2008 banking crisis, the 2013 Birtherism controversy questioning the legitimacy of the presidency of Barack Obama, and the QAnon conspiracy.” Interweaving hot-topic terms, he ties Dispensationalism to “white evangelicals”, “QAnon conspiracy theories”, and “4Chan Internet Culture.” (332) Importantly, and shockingly, there is not a single source cited to conspire these accusations. Only later is a single poll from an unrecognized blog website cited as support for all of these connections. (333, n.18)

Lack of Appropriate Breadth Considering Influences

In an almost 400-page book, though, even all of this could be drowned out beneath a very-well made argument that is well-researched and appropriately contextualized. And to be clear, there is much in this text that will resonate with modern readers. Many of the trends that led to the rise of Dispensationalism will be familiar to young neo-Reformed individuals, such as the establishment of Bible Institutes and Seminaries, conferences, and independent missionary agencies. (98) And Hummel does address some modern trends, such as Christian nationalism and the seemingly endless battle between Premillennial and Postmillennial thought. (153)

And still, for all of his research, there is glaring emptiness when it comes to exploring the influence of certain thoughts on modern Dispensationalism. Hummel spends much time discussing the contentions of Carl F.H. Henry and goes on to note that the primary figure leading the charge against Dispensationalism from the more commonly accepted Premillennial camp of the current day was George E. Ladd. (206) And yet, he spends very little time at all discussing the views and contentions of Ladd (312). Instead, he devotes half a page to discussing how Ladd was an alcoholic whose marriage fell apart, leading to the conclusion that “few Protestant theologians took much note of Ladd.” (260-261)

Alongside this failure to recognize a major influence on the development of Premillennialism and indeed modern Dispensationalism, Hummel attributes Dispensationalism with credit for influencing such developments as “free grace”, “the sinner’s prayer” and “the language of ‘accepting’ Jesus ‘into your heart.’” (196) This is highly debatable, as these very same concepts are argued in Jason Cherry’s 2016 *The Culture of Conversionism* as springing from sources altogether aside from Dispensationalism. Furthermore, Hummel claims that Dispensationalism was responsible for the rise of “young-earth creationism.” (227) While there may be a correlation between those two parties (i.e., members of one frequently being members of the other), Dispensationalism's causal effect on the development or rise of YEC is not at all obvious.

Reflections and Conclusion

It would be foolish to assign *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism* a marginal place as a piece of modern Christian historical literature, as it is well-researched and will certainly find its place as a frequent reference source for future students and researchers of the Dispensational timeline. Its accessibility and great work in maintaining historical continuity alone are deserving of a tip of the hat.

But there is so much in this book that is left wanting. Influences that are explored are not clearly the right ones, while those which would seem to be more obvious choices are left unexplored. The author’s opinions make their way into the text, sometimes helpfully, but often inappropriately – especially for a scholarly piece. The author’s emphasis on racism when that sociological factor seems to have played very little part in the overall storyline and no part at all in the defense of the thesis of the book is regrettable, although this unfortunately fits the general issue with the book, which is that the thesis is not as clear as one would hope it to be. And even if it were, there are clear problems in Christian nuance that make the author’s efforts hard to commend.

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